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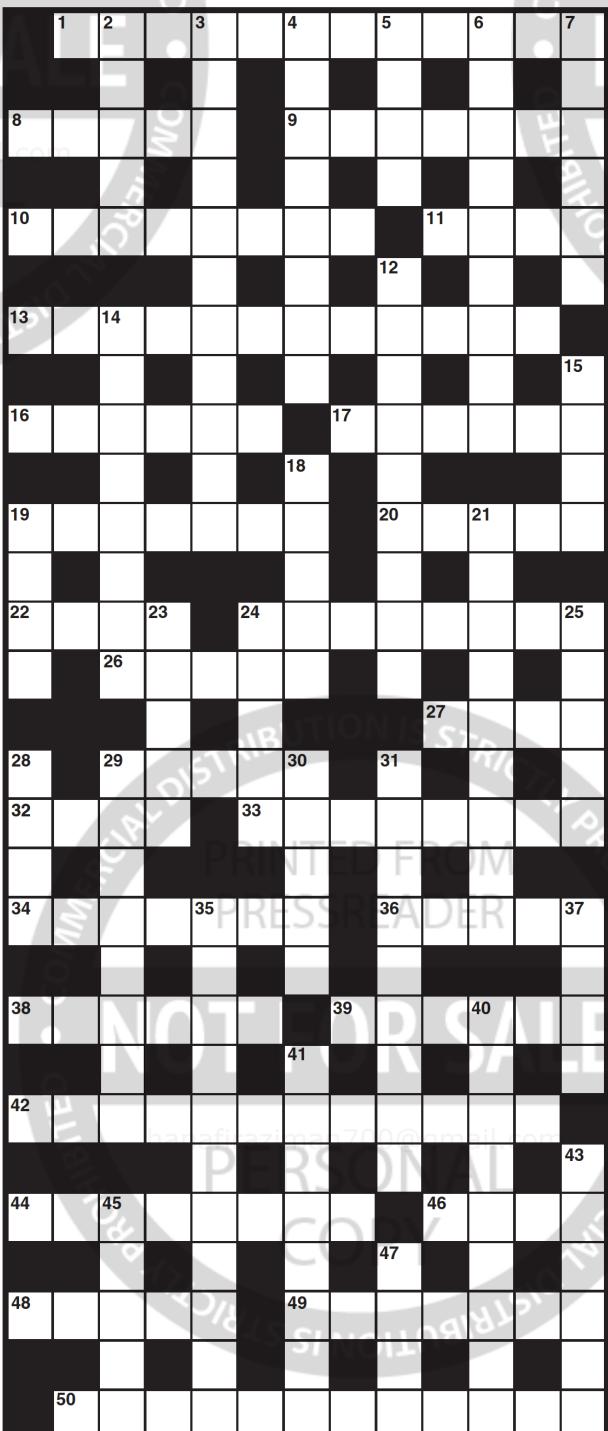
SEND your answers, name and address to: Giant Soccerword, Daily Star Sports Desk, 10 Lower Thames Street, London, EC3R 6EN. Entries by first post Friday. First correct one drawn will receive £25. Last week's winner was Stewart Fell, of Radcliffe, Manchester.

ACROSS

- Blackpool manager (5,7)
- Borgetti, Mexico striker who joined Bolton from Pachuca in 2005 (5)
- Malcolm, Bolton and Sheffield United centre half capped three times by England 1951-53 (7)
- Forward capped once by Scotland who joined Blackburn from Celtic in 1978 (3,5)
- Fred, Preston, Blackburn and Barrow goalkeeper who made 550 League appearances 1953-70 (4)
- England winger who joined Leicester from Portsmouth in 1954 and who later played centre-half (4,8)
- See 42 across
- Newcastle and England under-21 forward previously with Leeds (6)
- David, forward capped ten times by Scotland 1985-89, whose clubs included Darlington and Chelsea (7)
- Jesper, Denmark forward who won an FA Cup winners medal with Manchester United in 1985 (5)
- Xavier, Middlesbrough and Portugal defender (4)
- Scotland forward also with Manchester City and Huddersfield, who joined Manchester United from Torino in 1962 (5,3)
- Radebe, South Africa defender who joined Leeds from Kaiser Chiefs in 1994 (5)
- Andy, Wales midfielder or defender who joined Peterborough from Cardiff in 2003 (4)
- Stoke manager (5)
- Dumitrescu, Romanian forward who joined West Ham from Spurs in 1996 (4)
- Republic of Ireland manager (8)
- Jimmy, centre-half who won FA Cup winners medals with 42 across in 1954, and Aston Villa in 1957 (7)
- Gary, Portsmouth and England under-21 midfielder ('14)
- Jorge, Portuguese forward who joined Walsall from Feirense in 2000 (6)
- Igor, Croatian defender who joined Derby from Hajduk Split in 1995 (6)
- 16 and across. Football League champions for the only time in 1921 (4,8,6)
- Malcolm, Middlesbrough's former Derby and England under-21 forward (8)
- Bobby, Scotland forward who won an FA Cup winners medal with 42 across in 1968 (4)
- Leicester, name by which Leicester City were known 1884-1919 (5)
- Iain, Scotland midfielder who joined Kilmarnock from Rangers in 1998 (7)
- Forward whose clubs included Chester and Sheffield United, who managed Notts County 2002-2004 (5,7)

DOWN

- Pre-war St Johnstone, Blackburn, Newcastle and Scotland half-back (5)
- Home of Manchester United (3,8)
- West Ham and Wales defender previously with Cardiff (8)
- Jock, Burnley full-back capped four times by Scotland in 1954 (4)
- Arsenal, Manchester United and Eire striker who became Bradford City manager in 1991 (9)
- Gordon, defender who made 622 League appearances 1970-87, mainly for 42 across, Hull and Plymouth (6)
- Goalkeeper who won an FA Cup winners medal with Coventry in 1987 (9)
- Inter, Welsh Cup winners in 1999 (5,3)
- Jones, Wales inside forward who joined Arsenal from Wolves in 1938 (4)
- Real Madrid's on-loan Arsenal and Spain forward (5)
- Lazaridis, Australia midfielder who joined Perth Glory from Birmingham in 2006 (4)
- Manchester United and France defender (9)
- Newcastle and Spain forward previously with Deportivo La Coruna (5)
- Kelvin, Southampton's former Ipswich, Sunderland and England under-21 goalkeeper (5)
-, Athletic, Carling Cup finalists in 2006 (5)
- Manchester United, Arsenal and England striker who became Blackburn manager in 1998 (4)
- The, nickname of Plymouth Argyle (8)
- Jin, Oldham, Port Vale, Wrexham and Tranmere forward, who scored 118 League goals 1978-92 (5)
- Littlewoods Cup winners in 1988 (5,4)
- Goalkeeper also with Walsall, Wolves, Bolton and Port Vale, who made 222 League appearances for Shrewsbury 1963-68 (4,7)
- Kevin, England under-23 defender later with Fulham and Southend, who won an FA Cup winners medal with West Ham in 1975 (4)
- England striker previously with 31 down who joined Arsenal from Newcastle in 1976 (9)
- Real, Spanish champions in 1981 and 1982 (8)
- Keith, England full-back previously with Blackburn, who joined Burnley from Everton in 1972 (6)
- Sebastiano, Italy goalkeeper who won a European Cup winners medal with AC Milan in 1994 (5)
- Middlesbrough's Argentina midfielder previously with Sunderland (4)



LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1 Manchester, 5 Grimes, 9 McDonnell, 10 Coyne, 11 Scowcroft, 13 Hoyle, 14 O'Driscoll, 18 Everett, 19 Euell, 21 Dodds, 22 Carsley, 25 Fir, 26 Moore, 27 Sancho, 29 Storer, 33 Lukic, 34 Nou, 35 Newport, 36 Eirik, 37 Steed, 39 Spencer, 40 Ellington, 43 Radhi, 46 McManaman, 49 Ewing, 50 Horsfield, 51 Naybet, 52 Waddington.

DOWN: 1 Maccarone, 2 Hales, 3 Sissoko, 4 Ricard, 5 Geoff, 6 McEvoy, 7 Solvstedt, 8 Tyler, 12 Thierry, 15 Silksmen, 16 Ledley, 17 Lescott, 20 Earnshaw, 23 Lawrence, 24 Yakubu, 25 Fallon, 28 Hatters, 30 Rickens, 31 Clarke, 32 Joachim, 38 Don Merson, 39 Strachan, 41 Lampard, 42 Taliia, 44 D'Avray, 45 Barlow, 47 Clint, 48 Nevin.

FOOTBALL TRIVIA

Compiled by ALEX MURPHY



FAMOUS FANS: But who do Delia Smith (*left*) and Michael Parkinson support?



ON THIS DAY

On December 9 in...
1 ... 1984, which English team lost 1-0 to Independiente of Uruguay in Tokyo in the World Club Championship?
2 ... 1989, who scored their 7,000th Scottish League goal in a 3-1 home win over Motherwell?
3 ... 1994, which London club were reinstated in the FA Cup on appeal after they had been turfed out for financial irregularities?
4 ... 1997, which English club beat Steaua Bucharest 2-0 at home in the second leg of a UEFA Cup third round tie and went through 3-2 on aggregate?
5 ... 2006, which former QPR and England striker celebrates his 40th birthday?

GIVE US AN R

All these begin with R.
1 Arbroath's nickname.
2 Forest and Derby winger won 28 Scotland caps in the 1980s.
3 Knocked England out of Euro 2000.
4 Used to play at Elm Park.
5 West Brom and Coventry striker won five England caps in the 1980s.

EVERTON MANAGERS

Which ex-Everton players have managed these teams?
1 Ipswich Town, 2002-06.
2 Leeds, 2003.

3 Leicester, 1986-87.

4 Luton Town, 2003-96.

5 Man City, 1995-2006.

FAMOUS FANS

Which Championship teams do these TV presenters support?

1 Delia Smith.
2 Michael Parkinson.
3 Nick Owen.
4 Phillip Schofield.
5 Richard Keys.

SUPER ASIANS

Which countries did these Asian Players of the Year represent?

1 Ahmed Radhi, 1988 – Iran, Iraq or Kuwait?

2 Kim Jong-Sung, 1989-91 – Cambodia, N Korea or S Korea?

3 Hidetoshi Nakata, 1997-98 – Japan, Laos or Taiwan?

4 Saed Owairan, 1994 – Saudi Arabia, Singapore or UAE?

5 Fan Zhiyi, 2001 – Bhutan, China or Mongolia?

CHAMPIONS

In which countries do these teams hold the record for most national titles won?
1 Rapid, 32.
2 Siemra Wanderers, 26.
3 Skonto Riga, 15.

4 Kaizer Chiefs, 10.

5 Saint Etienne, 10.

CENTURY MAKERS

For which countries have these players made over 100 appearances?

1 Dino Zoff, 112 caps, 1968-83.
2 Carlos Valderrama, 111, 1985-98.

3 ... 1994, which London club were reinstated in the FA Cup on appeal after they had been turfed out for financial irregularities?

4 ... 1997, which English club beat Steaua Bucharest 2-0 at home in the second leg of a UEFA Cup third round tie and went through 3-2 on aggregate?

5 ... 2006, which former QPR and England striker celebrates his 40th birthday?

ITALIAN STARS

For which Italian teams have these players been banging in the goals this season?

1 Gyan Asamoah.
2 Hernan Crespo.
3 Luca Toni.
4 Sergio Pellissier.
5 Vincenzo Montella.

NON-LEAGUE NAMES

Complete the full names of these Conference North clubs.

1 Blyth ...
2 Farsley ...
3 Gainsborough ...
4 Moor ...
5 Vauxhall ...

WORLD CUP GOALS

Who scored the first goal in these World Cup Finals?

1 1986, Argentina 3 West Germany 2 – Diego Maradona, Jose-Luis Brown or Rudi Völler?

2 1990, West Germany 1 Argentina 0 – Andy Brehme, Lothar Matthäus or Pierre Littbarski?

3 1998, France 3 Brazil 0 – Emmanuel Petit, Lilian Thuram or Zinedine Zidane?

4 2002, Brazil 2 Germany 0 – Ronaldo or Ronaldinho or Romário?

5 2006, Italy 1 France 1 – Thierry Henry, Marco Materazzi or Zinedine Zidane?

ANSWERS

1 Norwich	3 Portugal	5 Zimbabwe
2 Bristol	4 Colombia	6 Zambia
3 Rotherham	5 Mali	7 Malawi
4 Bradford	6 Libya	8 Mauritius
5 Mansfield	7 Lesotho	9 Chile
6 Fleetwood	8 Costa Rica	10 Costa Rica
7 Leyton	9 Jordan	11 Costa Rica
8 Morecambe	10 Cyprus	12 Costa Rica
9 Bury	11 Greece	13 Costa Rica
10 Hartlepool	12 Malta	14 Costa Rica
11 Wrexham	13 Malta	15 Costa Rica
12 Stevenage	14 Norway	16 Costa Rica
13 Chesterfield	15 Norway	17 Costa Rica
14 Accrington	16 Norway	18 Costa Rica
15 Walsall	17 Norway	19 Costa Rica
16 Oldham	18 Norway	20 Costa Rica
17 Colchester	19 Norway	21 Costa Rica
18 Bury	20 Norway	22 Costa Rica
19 Walsall	21 Norway	23 Costa Rica
20 Oldham	22 Norway	24 Costa Rica
21 Accrington	23 Norway	25 Costa Rica
22 Bury	24 Norway	26 Costa Rica
23 Colchester	25 Norway	27 Costa Rica
24 Bury	26 Norway	28 Costa Rica
25 Oldham	27 Norway	29 Costa Rica
26 Accrington	28 Norway	30 Costa Rica
27 Bury	29 Norway	31 Costa Rica
28 Colchester	30 Norway	32 Costa Rica
29 Bury	31 Norway	33 Costa Rica
30 Accrington	32 Norway	34 Costa Rica
31 Bury	33 Norway	35 Costa Rica
32 Colchester	34 Norway	36 Costa Rica
33 Bury	35 Norway	37 Costa Rica
34 Accrington	36 Norway	38 Costa Rica
35 Bury	37 Norway	39 Costa Rica
36 Colchester	38 Norway	40 Costa Rica
37 Accrington	39 Norway	41 Costa Rica
38 Bury	40 Norway	42 Costa Rica
39 Colchester	41 Norway	43 Costa Rica
40 Accrington	42 Norway	44 Costa Rica
41 Bury	43 Norway	45 Costa Rica
42 Colchester	44 Norway	46 Costa Rica
43 Accrington	45 Norway	47 Costa Rica
44 Bury	46 Norway	48 Costa Rica
45 Colchester	47 Norway	49 Costa Rica
46 Accrington	48 Norway	50 Costa Rica

GONE FISHIN'

with RICHARD LEE



IF ONLY: Richard Lee with the world's first 100lb carp...thanks to a bit of photo wizardry

Carp could weigh a ton

EXPERTS are predicting carp could one day grow over 100lb following the capture of a new world record mirror.

The immense fish weighed in at 87lb 2oz and fell to pro-golfer and keen angler Gary Hague during a trip to French hotspot Rainbow Lakes.

Incredibly, the mammoth specimen is the same carp that the Derbyshire ace broke the world record with 12 months ago.

In the past year, the mirror has put on another 3lb 8oz, fuelling speculation that a carp could one day surpass the 100lb mark.

Leading fisheries lecturer Simon Scott said: "This fish could easily break the ton mark."

"It's no surprise that carp and other species are getting bigger as we now introduce phenomenal quantities of high quality bait."

MONSTER ROD-BENDERS

Just how big can our UK coarse fish grow? Simon Scott predicts the records of the future...

OLD UK RECORD	CURRENT RECORD	2020 RECORD?
Carp: 44lb, 1952	65lb 14oz, 2005	71lb
Barbel: 13lb 12oz, 1962	21lb 3oz, 2006	25lb
Bream: 15lb 6oz, 1985	19lb 10 oz, 2005	23 lb
Chub: 8lb 4oz, 1960	8lb 14oz, 2005	9lb 3oz
Tench: 10lb 1oz, 1975	15lb 3oz, 2001	18lb

Prize marlin fed to sharks

ONE of the biggest black marlin ever landed has been caught by a teenager who later killed it.

Conservationists in Australia are horrified after the 14-year-old brought the 1,100lb fish to his father's boat – and slaughtered it.

Shame

A spokesman for the Australian Marine Conservation Society said: "It's a shame we have not evolved beyond killing trophy fish."

The five-metre-long female ended up being fed to sharks.

HOTSPOTS

Whitmore Fisheries, Kirkham, Lancs: Chub and barbel nets to 70lb on feederfished maggot, cast to the island on Doughnut Lake.

Decoy Lakes, Whittlesey, Cambs: Corn over hemp or pellet on Beastie lake still getting good results on carp.

Alders Farm, Great Brickhill, Bucks: A recent 185 bag of carp signals that the cold weather hasn't hit the Alders farm – pole and pellet on the Match pool working best.

River Nene, Cambs: Just fining down and perfect for roach sport on the pole, bream should be active in coloured water on groundbait feeder tactics.

BIG-FIGHT SPECIAL: Danny's desperate

I WON'T BE COVERING UP AGAIN!



HARD TO BEAR:
Danny Williams looks on as shock winner Matt Skelton drops to his knees after the verdict



by KEVIN FRANCIS

DANNY WILLIAMS was so embarrassed by his loss to Matt Skelton that he covered his head with a towel whenever he left his house.

The 'Brixton Bomber', who once famously defeated Mike Tyson, lost a unanimous points decision to former kickboxer Skelton when they met in Cardiff in July.

Heavyweight Williams climbs back into the ring tonight for the first time since that reversal when he meets Audley Harrison in a top-of-the-bill clash at London's ExCel Arena.

And Williams, 33, says that his tame surrender to Skelton has given him just the right mindset to defeat former Olympic super-heavyweight champion Harrison.

Silly

He said: "I didn't leave the house for a few weeks after the Skelton fight and then it was only because I had to. I had to get my car from the garage."

"I had a towel over my head and let the wife drive but people still recognised me."

"My wife thought I was being silly but it was embarrassing."

"It was a few more weeks before I could walk out with my head up."

"I let myself down so badly against Skelton. I let a guy who had only been a professional for three years humiliate me."

"It was so embarrassing but it was the best thing that could have happened to me."

"It was a conscious decision to shut myself away and get back to basics."

"Part of it was obviously embarrassment but I also needed to get hold of myself and get to grip with things."

"The Skelton fight has helped me without people knowing it."

Tonight's contest is a rematch with the man Williams convincingly defeated on points in the same arena a year ago.

Harrison was criticised by fight fans for his abysmal performance that night.

And the duo must really raise their game because they now top the TV bill

KHAN CAN RULE AT 21

AMIR KHAN believes he is now just five fights away from realising his dream of becoming a world champion.

Khhan, who turned 20 yesterday, goes for his first title tonight when he tackles Frenchman Rachid Drilzane for the vacant IBF Intercontinental light-welterweight crown at London's ExCel Arena.

British Boxing Board of Control rules prevent any fighter under 20 from fighting for a title and Khan said: "To get the chance just a day into my 21st year is absolutely marvellous."

Khhan, who won the lightweight

by KEVIN FRANCIS

silver medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, added: "This fight will put me bang on course to fight for a world title at 21."

"I am getting more mature but I know I am not a seasoned pro yet."

Faster

"That's why I would like maybe eight fights next year."

"I want to win one of the major world titles and I will be ready in five fights. I have come on so much."

"Had you asked me a couple of fights ago I would have said 'no' but

I am getting stronger, faster and more focused."

"I want to win a main title, one of the big ones. I want to be a name – not a nobody. I'm definitely ready."

"The training has been harder than the fights but when you train hard it makes it easier in the ring."

"On tonight's test, the Bolton-based superstar added: "I have so much excitement inside of me."

"I have a title fight in front of me now and the ordinary fights can get boring!"

PREDICTION: There's just no stopping hungry Khan, who I think will win around the sixth.



to take out Skelton humiliation on Harrison



Bulls in clear on Solo

■ by MIKE PLATT

BRADFORD BULLS have been cleared of tapping up David Solomona.

The Bulls were reported to the RFL by Wakefield, who claimed the New Zealand international was approached late last season.

But disciplinary commissioner Norman Sarsfield has ruled Bradford have no case to answer — so the Wildcats are considering an appeal. Solomona had two years of his contract to run but Wakefield say he asked in October to be released and they eventually agreed a deal with the Bulls said to be around £200,000.

Bradford say Solomona's agent approached several clubs when Wakefield's Super League future was in doubt but that they'd never sought to discuss a move before the end of the season.

Bulls chairman Peter Hood said: "We were always confident of our position in relation to these unfounded allegations."

Wakefield chief executive Steve Ferres said: "We're extremely disappointed and are looking into whether we can appeal."



WARREN PEACE:
Audley Harrison
and Danny Williams
eyeball each other at a
Press conference with
promoter Frank Warren
stuck in the middle

It's brawl over now

From Back Page

Olympic super-heavyweight champion. As Warren tried to intervene, the boxes tumbled around with security staff trying to separate them.

A barrier surrounding the scales broke, with photographers and TV crews also tumbling over.

Simon Block, the general secretary of the British Board of Boxing Control, who was caught up in the melee, said: "This is the unacceptable face of boxing. It is simply no good for the sport.

He added: "It is so stupid for them to risk injury with the real fight just around the corner.

Jeered

"I told both of them in no uncertain terms that it was very wrong indeed.

"There will be a hearing, obviously, and they might be fined for this.

"It's just too soon to make a definitive statement on that." Tonight's fight is a rematch of the contest at the same arena a year ago, which Williams won on points in a bout so dull, the crowd jeered both men.

Warren said: "There was more action in those few seconds than there was in the entire 12 rounds last time these two met!"

For the record, Harrison weighed in at 17st 13.5lb, with Williams tipping the scales at 19st 1lb.

Instead of the WBO world featherweight title clash between Scott Harrison and Nicky Cook, which was called off following Harrison's failure to make the weight.

Williams knows the pain Audley has felt since his beating.

He added: "He says when I beat him he felt the same way as I did after my bout with Skelton.

"For him it was worse because he got caned in the newspapers and people still think he is a joke.

"When I went out after

that Skelton loss I didn't want anybody to recognise me. Even when I beat Audley I didn't want people to recognise me.

"Even though I won I was still embarrassed by the performance.

Call

"It is not just about winning. It is about performing in my eyes as well. The loss to Skelton was a wake-up call."

Williams agreed to tonight's fight at just eight days' notice following the withdrawal of Skelton.

He has a hand injury. Meanwhile, 35-year-old Harrison knows that, after two defeats in his last three bouts, he needs to produce the goods to stand any chance of climbing back up the world rankings.

He said: "I just want to focus on the boxing.

"I don't want to be a 45-year-old with money in the bank but not having achieved my ambitions because I got closed out.

"It's about being a world champion and whatever I need to do and, whoever I need to work with to get

there, I'll do that because that is my overall goal. I went through a stage of beating myself up but I'm a bigger man than that.

Last

"I have been deflected, pushed off to the side and seen a few horrible performances — but I will achieve my goal."

PREDICTION: It's something of a Last Chance Saloon for both fighters — and I'm taking Harrison to be the one who celebrates with a points win.

HOT STORIES

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** JERK OFF ** 0171	Older woman 0909 9673521
Naughty Wife 0172	Dirt cheap 0909 109936
Mature Aunty 0173	Pregnant slut 0909 9670957
First time SEX 0174	Black & Live 0909 9670956
Masturbation 0175	Be Punished 0909 9673520
Eavesdrop on SEX 0176	Unzip & ring 0909 9670136
Forced TV Shame 0177	Indian Live 0909 9673519
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Black & Live	0909 9670956
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 Coca-Cola CHAMPIONSHIP

TEAM TALK

BIRMINGHAM v PRESTON

BLUES boss Steve Bruce has no new injury problems, with midfielder Damien Johnson yet to recover from a double fracture of the jaw and David Dunn out with a calf niggle. MATT HILL has been struggling with a hamstring problem for Preston and he and fellow full-back Callum Davidson (groin and knee) remain doubtful. LAST SEASON: No game. LAST FIVE GAMES: Birmingham DWLW; Preston DWDD. REF: M Riley (W Yorks)

CARDIFF v IPSWICH

CITY'S Kevin Cooper will start for the first time this season. Will Flood (thigh) and Glenn Loovens (hamstring) are crocked and Stephen McPhail is banned. IPSWICH are without Alan Lee (ban), while Dan Harding and on-loan Charlton midfielder Simon Walton return from suspension.

LAST SEASON: Cardiff 2 Ipswich 1, Ipswich 1 Cardiff 0.

LAST FIVE GAMES: Cardiff WLDD; Ipswich LLWLD; REF: A Hall (W Mids)

COVENTRY v BURNLEY

COVENTRY striker Kevin Kyle returns from suspension, but defender Marcus Hall serves a one-match ban. Adam Virgo could make the bench after recovering from ligament damage. BURNLEY manager Steve Cotterill is again without Andy Gray (foot), who is out until February.

LAST SEASON: Coventry 1 Burnley 0, Burnley 4 Coventry 0.

LAST FIVE GAMES: Coventry LWLWD; Burnley LLLWD; REF: M Thorpe (Suffolk)

C PALACE v COLCHESTER

PALACE welcome back James Scowcroft (ban), but Danny Butterfield (groin) is likely to be replaced at right-back by Matt Lawrence. AIDAN DAVIDSON (chest) and Chris Barker (ineligible). Richard Garcia (ankle) could make the bench but Marino Keith (Achilles) is still out. LAST SEASON: No game. LAST FIVE GAMES: Palace LWLWD; Colchester LLWW; REF: R Lewis (Shrops)

LEEDS v DERBY

HAYDEN FOXE will return from a ban to help ease Leeds' problems at full-back, where Gary Kelly (back) could be out long-term. Matt Kilgallon (ankle) is doubtful and Ian Westlake banned. DERBY defender Michael Johnson has returned to training after limping out of last week's 1-0 defeat at West Brom.

LAST SEASON: Derby 0 Leeds 0, Leeds 3 Derby 1.

LAST FIVE GAMES: Norwich WLDWL; Derby WWWLW; Sheff Wed WLDWW; REF: K Woolmer (N'ants)

PLYMOUTH v HULL

ARGYLE will be without David Norris and Hasney Aljofree (bans). Full-backs Lee Hodges (knee) and Paul Connolly (hamstring) are unlikely to feature. HULL caretaker-boss Phil Brown could make several changes. Steve McPhee has been out for 14 months with a knee injury, but may come into contention. LAST SEASON: Hull 1 Plymouth 0, Plymouth 0 Hull 1. LAST FIVE GAMES: Plymouth DLLWL; Hull WLDD; REF: L Probert (Glos)

SOUTHEND v SOUTHAMPTON

BOTTOM side Southend are still without key men Kevin Maher (ban) and Adam Barrett, who has an abdominal problem.

INIGO IDIAKEZ (thigh) returns to the Saints squad after a month out. David Prutton will also be pushing for a start after his first appearance of the season at Hull last week.

LAST SEASON: No game.

LAST FIVE GAMES: Southend DLLL; Saints DWWW; REF: C Webster (Tyne & Wear)

STOKE v QPR

ANDY GRIFFIN is set to play his last game for Stoke as his three-month loan comes to an end. Fellow loanee Liam Lawrence (thigh) remains a doubt, as does Danny Higginbotham and Clint Hill (both hamstrings).

QPR will be without forward Ray Jones and defender Zesh Rehman, both of whom are suspended.

LAST SEASON: QPR 1 Stoke 2, Stoke 1 QPR 2.

LAST FIVE GAMES: Stoke WWWWD; QPR WWLL; REF: M Atkinson (W Yorks)

SUNDERLAND v LUTON

SUNDERLAND are again expected to be missing striker Chris Brown (ankle), with keeper Ben Alnwick (shoulder) definitely out. Stanislav Varga is available again after a ban.

DEAN MORGAN (hip) is fit for the Hatters. Luton are still without Sam Parkin (ankle) and Paul Underwood (infection).

LAST SEASON: No game. LAST FIVE GAMES: Sunderland DWDWW; Luton LLLLW; REF: A Penn (W Mids)

WOLVES v LEICESTER

MICHAEL McINDOE (hamstring) and Leon Clarke (knee) both face fitness tests for Wolves, but Jody Craddock is expected to feature after recovering from a head injury.

FOXES captain Paddy McCarthy is banned, but Darren Kenton is available after missing five games with a calf problem.

LAST SEASON: Leicester 1 Wolves 0, Wolves 0 Leicester 0.

LAST FIVE GAMES: Wolves LDDDW; Leicester DLLL; REF: P Dowd (Staffs)

BARNSLEY v WEST BROM

TOMORROW TYKES winger Kyel Reid is available after a ban. Antony Kay (groin) is still struggling and Ronnie Wallwork is recovering in hospital following surgery after his stabbing.

BAGGIES defender Nigel Adkins has no new injury or suspension problems and may field an unchanged starting line-up.

SERIOUSLY
football

Everton boss all ready

VAN MAN IS

■ by CHRIS HARPER

DAVID MOYES has challenged Andy Van der Meyde to show his wing wizard skills and prove he has a Premiership future with Everton.

Van der Meyde's 15-month career at Goodison Park has been blighted by injuries and bust-ups – and the Dutchman has been regarded as a flop in England.

But the winger returned to action with a starring role against West Ham last week and Moyes wants a repeat display at Portsmouth today to help convince him he was right to pay £1.8m for the former Inter Milan star.

The Everton boss said: "The next few weeks are obviously a chance for him finally to show what he can do – and prove himself at Everton."

Threat

"If you look through his record, his heyday in Holland with Ajax before he went to Inter Milan he was terrific. He'd go past people, was a real threat and he did that for us against West Ham."

"He knocked some decent crosses in for us. He can do that when you give him the ball. He can be a real threat."

"He's had a difficult period through injury and different situations but he did well for us



MOYES: Wants repeat

against West Ham. The hardest part we've found is him getting him to a level where we can get 90 minutes from him."

"If you look at his credentials, I wasn't really surprised at how well he did."

"But we know he has to produce that regularly and consistently."

"That's what we've

League 1 TEAM TALK

BLACKPOOL v SWANSEA

POOL boss Simon Grayson is set to name an unchanged side.

SWANSEA duo Izzy Iriekpen (hamstring) and Lee Trundle (stomach bug and thigh) hope to return, but Darren Pratley is suspended.

BOURNEMOUTH v PORT VALE

STEVE CLARIDGE may make his 1,000th career outing for the Cherries after James Hayter (chest) and Steve Fletcher (hamstring) were ruled out. AKPO SODJE (ankle) and Richard Walker (knee) both return for Port Vale.

BRENTFORD v TRANMERE

BEES caretaker-boss Scott Fitzgerald welcomes back Adam Griffiths (bans) but Paul Brooker (tonsilitis) will miss out. TRANMERE striker Gareth Taylor (hamstring) could be set for a recall in place of Calvin Zola.

BRIGHTON v CHELTENHAM

BRIGHTON boss Dean Wilkins is set to give late fitness checks to Guy Butters (calf) and Richard Carpenter (shin). STRIKER Steve Guinan returns from a ban for the Robins and could get the nod to start up front.

CARLISLE v SCUNTHORPE

CARLISLE skipper Kevin Gray (head) is expected to be passed fit, but David Raven (hip) is out again.

NEW Scunthorpe boss Nigel Adkins has no new injury or suspension problems and may field an unchanged starting line-up.

CHESTERFIELD v OLDHAM

LEADING scorer Caleb Folan (ankle) is struggling and is facing a race against time to recover.

OLDHAM boss John Sheridan expects Richie Wellens to shake off a slight knock, but Chris Hall (illness) is a doubtful.

CREWE v NOTT' M FOREST

CREWE hope to have Nicky Maynard (hamstring), Darren Moss (hernia) and Michael O'Connor (knee) fit. FOREST boss Colin Calderwood is sweating on the fitness of Paul Smith (back) and striker Junior Agogo (hamstring).

L ORIENT v HUDDERSFIELD

ORIENT boss Martin Ling will be without John Mackie (foot) so Brian Saah is likely to partner Alton Thelwell in defence. TERRIERS keeper Matt Glennon (knee) and skipper Jon Worthington (groin strain) both face late fitness tests.

MILLWALL v BRADFORD

MILLWALL welcome back defender Zak Whitbread (ban), but Marvin Elliott (ankle) is doubtful. BRADFORD captain David Wetherall (head) is expected to be fit, but Ben Muirhead and Dean Windass are banned.

NORTHAMPTON v DONCASTER

VETERAN Ian Taylor remains a major doubt for the Cobblers with an Achilles injury and faces a fitness test. DONCASTER defender James O'Connor is set to battle through a heel injury and play with the aid of a pain-killing injection.

ROtherham v BRISTOL CITY

MILLERS boss Alan Knill has a virtually full-strength squad as Michael Keane (hamstring) has recovered. SCOTT MURRAY is pushing for a starting spot for City after impressing for the reserves, while Jamie McAllister could play.

YEOVIL v GILLINGHAM

PAUL TERRY and Mark Lynch are both ruled out by knee injuries, while on-loan Leon Best could make his full home debut. DEAN BRILL is to start in goal for the Gills after an emergency loan move to replace the injured Kelvin Jack.



to go Dutch with reborn star MOTORING FOR MOYES

been waiting for. It's been frustrating to have that talent there but not being able to use it.

"But it's been down to either injury or illness, one thing after another, which has set him back at different times.

"Hopefully he can pick up and we can benefit from that. He has the chance now to prove he has a future at this club.

"If you look at him, he's missed an awful lot of football.

"When he came here we knew he already had an injury, so he's hardly had a chance to get up and running with us.

"He will feature at Portsmouth. We know he's fit enough to play but we know he's not fit enough to get through 90 minutes for sure.

"I've always thought he was the sort of player who could win you games, especially at Goodison Park."

O'Neil has himself in a perm

■ by PETER WHITE

GARY O'NEIL is so convinced he will end his goal drought today that he has booked himself an appointment at the hairdressers on Monday.

Portsmouth captain O'Neil and teammate Sean Davis both vowed not to cut their hair until they scored this campaign – and both are now sporting long locks after failing to find the net.

Former England Under-21 captain O'Neil is so fed up he has been doing extra shooting practice in training and is adamant he will make Everton pay at Fratton Park this afternoon.

Joke

He said: "I have been doing some extra work with coach Joe Jordan, as well as looking at how my goals came last season.

"I have been taking note of the build-ups and things like that to see if there is anything I could be doing now that I was doing then."

O'Neil has not scored since netting in the victory at Fulham on April 1. Since

then he has made 22 appearances, including 15 since the bet was struck.

Davis has played 14 times this season without finding the net and has scored only twice in 32 matches since joining Pompey from Tottenham last January.

O'Neil added: "It all started as a bit of a joke when Sean said something about growing his hair."

"Then we got on to a conversation about goalscoring midfielders and he tried to claim that he was one.

"So I struck the bet that we couldn't cut our hair until we scored.

"But I am so confident about this weekend I'll be making my appointment for Monday."

TABLES

Barclays Premiership

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Man Utd	16	13	1	2	37	11	41
Chelsea	15	11	2	2	25	8	35
Arsenal	15	7	4	4	22	12	25
Liverpool	16	7	4	5	19	15	25
Reading	16	8	1	7	19	21	25
Everton	16	6	5	5	20	15	25
West Ham	16	5	4	7	16	19	24
Aston Villa	16	7	3	6	15	15	24
Bolton	16	7	3	6	15	15	24
Tottenham	16	6	4	6	15	20	22
Wigan	16	8	1	7	21	18	22
Man City	16	5	5	6	16	23	20
Fulham	16	10	6	5	34	24	25
Blackburn	16	4	4	8	13	21	26
Middlesbrough	16	4	4	8	13	21	26
Sheffield Utd.	16	3	3	10	16	14	14
WBA	16	4	4	8	13	21	26
Charlton	16	1	7	7	10	20	10
Watford	15	1	7	7	10	20	10

Coca-Cola Championship

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Birmingham	21	12	4	5	32	21	40
Preston	21	10	8	3	21	18	38
QPR	21	10	7	4	23	18	37
Derby	21	11	4	6	31	25	37
Southampton	21	10	6	5	34	24	37
Stoke	21	10	5	6	29	22	36
West Brom	21	9	5	7	23	23	34
Wolves	21	9	5	7	23	23	32
Plymouth	21	7	9	5	27	25	30
Coventry	21	9	3	9	20	18	30
Sheffield United	21	8	6	7	27	27	30
Newcastle	21	4	4	13	17	19	36
Middlesbrough	21	4	4	13	17	19	36
Sheffield Wed.	21	8	6	7	27	27	30
Norwich	21	8	5	8	28	32	33
Crystal Palace	21	7	4	10	29	26	34
Ipswich	21	7	4	10	28	36	35
Leeds	21	6	5	10	24	41	30
Blackburn	21	6	4	11	27	38	22
Barnsley	21	6	4	11	27	38	22
Leeds	21	6	4	11	27	38	22
Southend	21	2	6	13	16	38	12

Coca-Cola League One

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Nottingham Forest	20	10	6	4	20	15	36
Scunthorpe	20	11	3	6	26	18	35
Bristol City	20	10	5	5	24	18	35
Oldham	20	10	4	6	21	18	35
Grimsby	20	9	4	7	28	23	31
Yeovil	20	9	4	7	28	19	31
Bradford	20	8	6	6	29	26	35
Blackpool	20	7	7	6	28	22	35
Doncaster	20	6	9	5	21	17	37
Crewe	20	6	9	5	21	17	37
Brighton	20	8	3	9	20	30	37
Gillingham	20	8	3	9	24	34	37
Port Vale	20	6	7	7	25	25	35
Huddersfield	20	6	7	7	25	30	35
Chesterfield	20	6	6	8	27	24	34
Walsall	20	11	4	5	26	21	35
Rotherham	20	9	4	6	26	21	35
Wimborne	20	4	4	8	19	26	35
Morecambe	20	6	6	8	21	21	35
Cheltenham	20	6	6	8	21	27	35
Brentford	20	3	8	9	16	35	17
Leyton Orient	20	4	5	11	25	37	17

(Preston Town deducted 10pts)

Coca-Cola League Two

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Watford	20	14	5	1	34	10	47
Lincoln City	20	11	4	5	26	18	36
Oldham	20	10	4	6	26	18	35
Shrewsbury	20	9	4	7	28	23	31
Yeovil	20	11	4	5	24	19	31
Gravesend	20	8	5	7	29	27	35
Exeter	20	7	9	4	28	20	35
Aldershot	20	7	8	5	29	20	35
Walsall	20	7	8	5	29	20	35
Mansfield	20	6	6	8	26	30	34
Wrexham	20	6	6	8	35	24	36
Grimsby	20	6	5	9	21	22	33
Amersham St	20	5	6	9	21	27	35
Barnet	20	5	6	9	26	35	21
Rochdale	20	5	6	9	21	27	35
Tranmere Rovers	20	4	7	9	24	31	35
Boston Utd	20	4	5	11	25	37	17
Macclesfield	20	1	12	36	17		

(Crawley Town deducted 10pts)

Scottish Premier League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Celtic	17	14	3	0	39	13	45
Rangers	17	8	4	5	27	21	46
Aberdeen	17	8	4	5	22	14	46
Hamilton	17	7	4	6	24	17	42
Kilmarnock	17	7	4	6	24	27	45
Hearts	17	6	6	5	23	18	44
Falkirk	17	6	6	5	23	18	44
Inverness CT	17	6	6	5	26	20	40
Motherwell	17	5	3	9	21	19	38
St Mirren	17	5	3	8	16	23	37
Dundee	17	4	4	9	21	17	36
Dundee Utd	17	3	11	12	31	12	35
Dunfermline	17	3	11	12	31	12	35
Queen of South	16	3	10	11	31	11	31
Alloa	16	3	2	11	32	16	35
Airdrie Utd	16	3	2	11	32	16	35

(Celtic, Rangers, Hamilton deducted 10pts)

Scottish First Division

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Morton	16	11	3	2	35	12	45
Stirling	16	10	5	1	33	16	35
Blairgowrie	16	7	3	6	20	17	34
Ayr	16	7	3	6	20	17	34
Cowdenbeath	16	6	3	7	32	24	31
Alloa	16	5	6	5	23	18	31
Raith	16	5	6	6	16	20	38
Stranraer	16	5	3	8	23	36	17
Peterhead	16	5	2	9	29	29	17
East Fife	17	11	3	3	28	13	36
Arbroath	17	9	4	4	26	13	36
Queens Park	16	8	3	5	25	15	27
Dumbarton	16	8	2	6	22	13	26
Livingston	16	8	2	6	21	15	24
Dundee	16	7	2	7	21	18	23
Forfar	16	7	2	7	21	17	23
Perth County	16	5	4	8	16	21	26
Queen of South	16	3	10	11	31	16	35
Elgin	17	2	1	14	18	35	7

(Celtic, Rangers, Hamilton deducted 10pts)

Scottish Second Division

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
East Stirlingshire	17	11	3	3	28	13	36
Partick Thistle	17	10	4	3	25	13	35
Hamilton Academical	16	7	3	6	21	17	34
St Johnstone	16	7	3	6	21	17	34
Livingston	16	6	6	4	21	15	24
Dundee	16	7	2	7	21	18	23
Perth County	16	5	4	8	16	21	26
East Fife</							

Hart is Baggie begger

■ by GEORGE SCOTT

JOHN HARTSON has pleaded with boss Tony Mowbray to let him try bouncing the Baggies back into the big time.

The West Brom striker is desperate to spearhead a promotion push and prove he can still grace the Premiership. Hartson admitted he has yet to prove himself at the Hawthorns despite his winner in the 1-0 win over Derby last weekend.

But the Wales international is pressing for a recall ahead of tomorrow's trip to Barnsley.

Money

He said: "I said to the manager that I've got goals all my career and we, as a team, hadn't been scoring barrel-loads so I stated to him that if he was willing to make a change then I was willing to help and contribute."

"I've come to West Brom to try and help them reach promotion this season. We have the players to do that and I want to feel part of it."

"I'm here to contribute and not just pick my money up or go through the motions. I want to do well and help win promotion."

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Tomato-rage Boothroyd shows welcome mat

REF ROW AIDY VINE 'N DANDY



FURY: Boothroyd confronts Chris Foy at Portsmouth

AIDY BOOTHROYD insists the only tomatoes heading for ref Chris Foy today will be in the half-time sandwiches.

The Watford boss said he wanted to pelt the whistler with rotten tomatoes after his side's controversial defeat at Portsmouth last month.

Boothroyd was charged by the FA over his comments but he insists the pair are vine now - and he can't wait to ketchup with the official again at Vicarage Road this afternoon.

Foy takes charge of the Hornets' home clash with Reading and Boothroyd admitted: "It's funny how fate turns out."

"I've been cleared of my charge so that's great. I got the letter on Thursday to say I was off the hook."

"Chris will be welcomed here like all the referees are. He will get sandwiches, but after my comments I'll have to be careful what I put in them!"

Foy was in the spotlight again last weekend after awarding Cristiano

■ by PAUL JIGGINS

Ronaldo a penalty at Middlesbrough, with TV replays suggesting Manchester United's Portuguese winker took a dive.

Boothroyd added: "That's of no concern to me at all. I made my point to Chris on the day, when I wasn't very happy as we'd just got beaten."

"Referees are getting a hard time at the minute and they need help. I've been advocating the use of technology for a while and they do need it."

Grudges

"I went to Newcastle on Wednesday when a controversial penalty was given. If the referee could have had an eye in the sky to help him, the correct decision could have been made."

"Technology needs to be used with difficult decisions in the box, which are the key to winning and losing."

"They've got a tough job and I said my bit. I don't bear grudges. I'm sure Cristiano doesn't either and we'll move

on. If he's in this league then he must be one of the best referees because Keith Hackett wouldn't pick people he didn't think could do the job."

"I think it's good that we meet again so quickly, rather than later down the line. It gets it out of the way. I can pop in, have a joke with him and move on."

Charlton's last-gasp victory over Blackburn on Tuesday left Watford rooted to the bottom of the table with only one win all season and in a bid to get out of trouble Boothroyd will try to bring in five new faces when the transfer window reopens next month.

He said: "We need more firepower. We haven't got the depth we need. We didn't have it last year, but we were lucky with injuries and suspensions."

"The board have backed me all the way since I came here and I'm sure they will again."

"We'll be in the Premiership next year, I'm confident of that - because we have to be. There is no Plan B, only a Plan A."

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to referee Foy and vows to keep Hornets in top flight



PRIZE GUY: Coppell yesterday with his Manager of the Month award

Cop lets rip at Emre slur

FURIOUS Steve Coppell has hit out at Newcastle after revealing Emre branded Reading assistant manager Wally Downes a 'whore'.

The Turkish midfielder clashed with the Royals bench at St James's Park on Wednesday after a foul on Ibrahima Sonko angered Downes, who let rip with a four-letter outburst.

Emre claims he was insulted by the comments but it now appears he hit back at Downes by calling him a "putana" — which is Italian slang for goalkeeping coach.

Newcastle boss Glenn Roeder has since said he will not take action against the Royals, because he is not from "that kind of club."

Stormed

But Coppell has attacked the Newcastle boss by insisting he has no right to try and become the good guy over the incident.

Ahead of today's trip to Watford, Coppell stormed: "I've got to defend my staff. There were words exchanged after Emre tried to foul one of my players.

"My coach said: 'Eh, what the f*** is going on.' That was it, there was no personal slur.

"For some reason the player was very angry about it and swore at our people — in Italian for some reason — little knowing that my goalkeeping coach, Sali Bibbo, is Italian.

"The word was putana, which I think

■ by DEAN JONES

is fairly well known if you watch any Italian film! What the two of them said in their respective languages, well, there is no comparison."

Reading have already entered into a war of words with Chelsea this season after defending themselves over comments from Jose Mourinho, who claimed Stephen Hunt deliberately hurt goalkeeping Petr Cech.

And Coppell, who yesterday picked up the Manager of the Month award after Reading's brilliant November, is now at loggerheads with Newcastle chief Roeder.

Coppell added: "Glen has taken the high morale ground, saying he will not take the matter any further but, to be honest, I don't think he should have said anything publicly.

"He should have spoken to me first of all. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

Meanwhile, Reading's Brynjar Gunnarsson is set to face his former side this afternoon, due to a knock which captain Graeme Murty picked up in the bruising 3-2 defeat at Newcastle.

Gunnarsson has started just two games this season but is relishing the chance to pile more agony on the Watford side he left 17 months ago.

He said: "Playing against your old side always adds a little bit extra."

Keane Stokes up fire

■ by IAN MURTAGH

SUNDERLAND plan to make a New Year swoop for Arsenal whizzkid Anthony Stokes.

Manager Roy Keane confirmed the 18-year-old striker is one of several players he wants.

But he faces stiff competition after Stokes' fine form at Falkirk.

He has scored 13 goals in 13 games for the SPL side who want to extend his loan period until the end of the season.

Quality

"He's a goalscorer who's done very well in Scotland," said Keane.

"I've seen him twice against Celtic and Hearts and he was a threat in both games.

"We're interested in bringing in quality players and I have to say he's a real talent.

"I might be stepping up my interest in him though I would think Arsenal will be looking for top money."

Sunderland, unbeaten in four games, entertain Luton today. "There's been a lot of change, indecision and disappointment from last season but we are getting there and it's happening a bit quicker than I expected," added Keane.

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**BARCLAYS
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TEAM TALK

Blackburn v Newcastle

FRANCIS JEFFERS' hopes of making a comeback have been dashed after a recurrence of a groin injury. Tugay is expected to be restored to the starting line-up.

NEWCASTLE'S Kieron Dyer misses out having only just resumed training following a thigh injury along with knee injury victim Damien Duff.

Last season: Blackburn 0 Newcastle 3. Referee: Dermot Gallagher.

Bolton v West Ham, 5.15pm

GARY SPEED is set to make a record 500th Premier League appearance. Full-back Ricardo Gardner is likely to be on the bench.

WEST HAM'S Anton Ferdinand has an ankle injury and is a doubt. The Hammers will also make a late check on Javier Mascherano after a training knock.

Last season: Bolton 4 West Ham 1. Referee: Howard Webb.

Liverpool v Fulham

LIVERPOOL will recall Steven Gerrard, Jose Reina, Sami Hyypia and Steve Finnan after resting them for the Champions League trip to Galatasaray.

FULHAM have Frank Queudrue back from a gashed shin. Central defender Philippe Christanval is also back and skipper Luis Boa Morte has recovered from a hamstring strain.

Last season: Liverpool 5 Fulham 1. Referee: Uriah Rennie.

Man Utd v Man City, 12.45

UNITED fullback Patrice Evra is a major doubt after picking up a calf injury in Wednesday's Champions League win over Benfica.

CITY have no fresh injury concerns as they look to record their first Old Trafford derby-day win since 1974. Sun Jihai is still a long-term injury worry.

Last season: United 1 City 1. Referee: Graham Poll.

Middlesbrough v Wigan

BORO skipper George Boateng will lead his side after a successful appeal against his midweek red card at Tottenham. But Lee Cattermole is suspended.

WIGAN captain Arjan de Zeeuw is out with a toe injury. Striker Emile Heskey serves a one-match ban after collecting five yellow cards.

Last season: Boro 2 Wigan 3. Referee: Steve Bennett.

Portsmouth v Everton

PEDRO MENDES is banned after his dismissal against Aston Villa. Matt Taylor is a doubt with back trouble, Niko Kranjcar stands by Sean Davis (groin) is fit again.

EVERTON midfielder Leon Osman (hamstring) will not be risked. Mikel Arteta misses his second match with an ankle injury. Phil Neville (knee) is 50-50.

Last season: Portsmouth 0 Everton 1. Referee: Mark Clattenburg.

Tottenham v Charlton

SPURS will be without Robbie Keane (knee) and Jermaine Jenas (ankle) following the midweek win against Boro. Mido returns from a groin injury but Didier Zokora is banned after his dismissal against Boro.

CHARLTON'S Djimi Traore is out with a pulled hamstring, having just come back from a three-month absence after breaking his ankle at Chelsea.

Last season: Tottenham 3 Charlton 1. Referee: Mike Dean.

Watford v Reading

WATFORD will be without captain Gavin Mahon, who serves a one-match ban after collecting five bookings. Veteran defender Chris Powell returns from suspension.

READING give late fitness tests to Graeme Murty and Seol Ki-Hyeon (both toe). Irish duo Stephen Hunt (hamstring) and Kevin Doyle (thigh) are fit.

Last season: Watford 0 Reading 0. Referee: Chris Foy.

TOMORROW

Chelsea v Arsenal, 4pm

CHELSEA will recall Ashley Cole to face his former club. Claude Makelele is back in midfield after being rested against Levski Sofia. Captain John Terry is back after suspension in Europe.

ARSENAL'S Johan Djourou has got the all-clear from a hamstring worry to partner Philippe Senderos with William Gallas still out and Kolo Toure suspended.

Last season: Chelsea 1 Arsenal 0. Referee: Alan Wiley.

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Toon boss salutes warrior Butt

HERO NICKY IS BACK ON RIGHT ROED

GLENN ROEDER last night hailed Nicky Butt's transformation from Newcastle flop to Geordie warrior.

The former England and Manchester United star was a hate figure with Newcastle fans following a disastrous first season at St James's Park and few tears were shed when he was loaned out to Birmingham.

But since returning to the fold, Butt has been winning over his critics, culminating in loud applause in the dying moments of Wednesday's 3-2 win over Reading, when he was announced as man of the match.

Club captain Scott Parker is just days away from returning from a back injury but his recall is not guaranteed with Butt hitting it off so well alongside Emre in the midfield.

And, according to Roeder, he'll face Blackburn today – in a Newcastle side defending a seven-match unbeaten record – showing the same form he did on a regular basis at Old Trafford.

Claims

"Nicky's playing his best football for Newcastle," Roeder said. "Anyone watching him recently can see why he played so many games for Manchester United and England."

"He's a warrior because he has that winning mentality and never gives in."

"Against Reading, the technology we have here showed that he ran more than 12 kilometres in 90 minutes, covering more ground than anyone else on the pitch."

Roeder claims Butt's Newcastle rehabilitation proves that every player deserves to have a second chance.

"When he was at Birmingham last season, I told him I was looking forward to working with him this year but he wasn't sure I was telling the truth," added Roeder.

"What's happened with him offers hope for everyone."

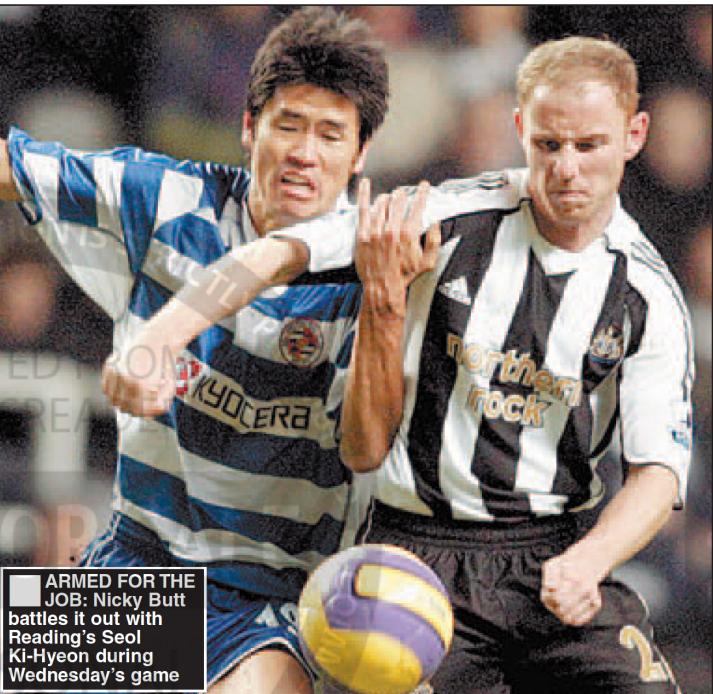
"He left here not in the best of circumstances and no one really thought he'd be back."

Heart

"It rarely happens but he's playing as well as ever and that just underlines his strength of character."

Ironically, Newcastle's improved form has coincided with a period when Roeder's side virtually picks itself, such is the Toon's casualty list.

With Titus Bramble, Craig Moore and Stephen Carr still missing, it means another chance for local lads Peter Ramage



ARMED FOR THE JOB: Nicky Butt battles it out with Reading's Seol Ki-Hyeon during Wednesday's game

■ by IAN MURTAGH

and Stephen Taylor to impress at the heart of the defence at Ewood Park.

And Roeder will get the perfect opportunity to compare their displays with that of Rovers' Lucas Neill, who, along with Zat Knight of Fulham, is a player he is keen to sign next month.

But the Toon chief is adamant that whoever comes in, the Geordie pair have bright futures.

"They're in positions which I feel are for older, more experienced players but they're both climbing up that learning curve," he said.

Roeder meanwhile, has hinted in-form Antoine Sibierski will have his 12-month contract extended in the new year.

MARK HUGHES is demanding a review of the transfer window because he fears it is cheating the fans.

The Blackburn boss has been unable to strengthen his side after losing Jason Roberts, Ryan Nelsen and Steven Reid to serious injury.

Broken

After one win in eight outings, struggling Rovers are just two points above the relegation zone as they take on fast-improving Newcastle.

Striker Roberts has a broken metatarsal. Reid is recovering from a serious back problem and New Zealand defender Nelsen has a damaged hamstring.

Hughes is frustrated he has to wait

another three weeks before he can bring in replacements when the January transfer window opens.

Hughes said: "Fans want to see the best players on the pitch. At the moment you can't address the situation when major players are not available because of the window.

"There should be a review and it should be debated.

"We're hurting because of our injuries. Given our current circumstances I'd get rid of the window.

"But it's here to stay and isn't going to change in the near future.

"Unfortunately we've got to work with it but that doesn't mean there shouldn't be a review."

Mark 'cheat' rap

■ by NEIL JOHNSTON

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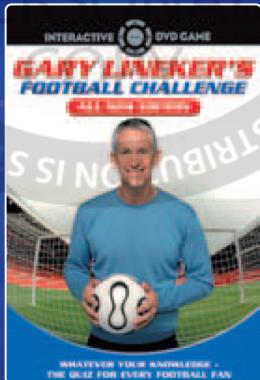
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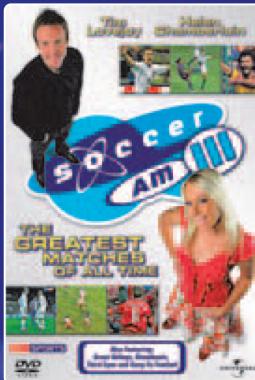
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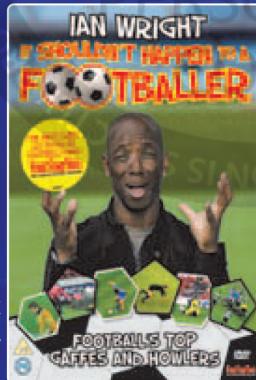
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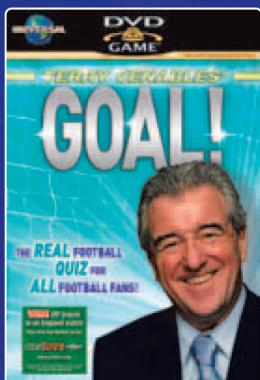
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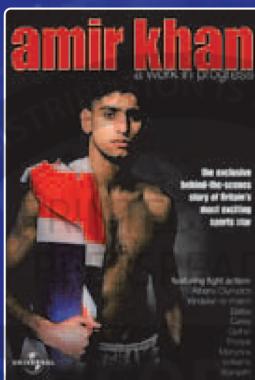
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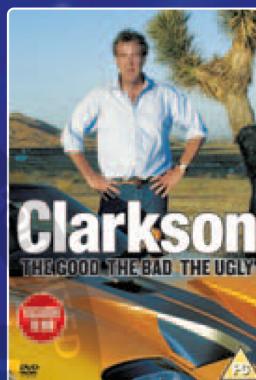
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**SERIOUSLY
football****Hammers boss sounds relegation cash warning****Lay off my Jag****PARD'S: WAGES DROP IF WE DO**

■ by SCOTT COLEMAN

ALAN PARDEW has warned his under-achieving squad they will be hit in the pocket if West Ham go down this season.

Following Eggert Magnusson's £85m takeover, all the talk around Upton Park has been about the money being pumped into the club and the size of Pardew's January transfer kitty.

But relegation would see the Hammers miss out on £25m in TV rights and Pardew insists the players won't escape the cutbacks that would follow.

He said: "Eggert has got a plan if we get relegated. He has to because when he bought the club we were in relegation trouble anyway, so it would have been foolish not to take that into consideration.

"All the contracts here, because we have been relegated before, have adjustments in them if we go down. The incentive for the players couldn't be greater.

"People think the players are under contract and if West Ham go down they'll be okay. Well, no. The financial situation of every player here changes if we go down."

Two successive defeats, against Everton and Wigan, have seen West Ham slip back into the Premiership's bottom three and they face a tough trip to Bolton this evening before a home clash with leaders Manchester United.

The Hammers were relegated in 2003, despite a great end-of-season run, and Pardew is desperate for his players to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Fight

He said: "We are under threat and we have to counter it now, not later on.

"Two months down the line is going to be too late. This is such an important time for us. I want the realisation of that to hit home with everybody who works here at West Ham."

"We need to stabilise ourselves quickly, regardless of the opposition. We've got Bolton and Manchester United, and we've got to attack both games and try to get something."

"It's not good addressing the situation in two months' time. I've seen teams do that and maybe that happened when West Ham got relegated last time."

"I'm not trying to threaten my players or anything like that, I'm just trying to help them understand that we need points now."

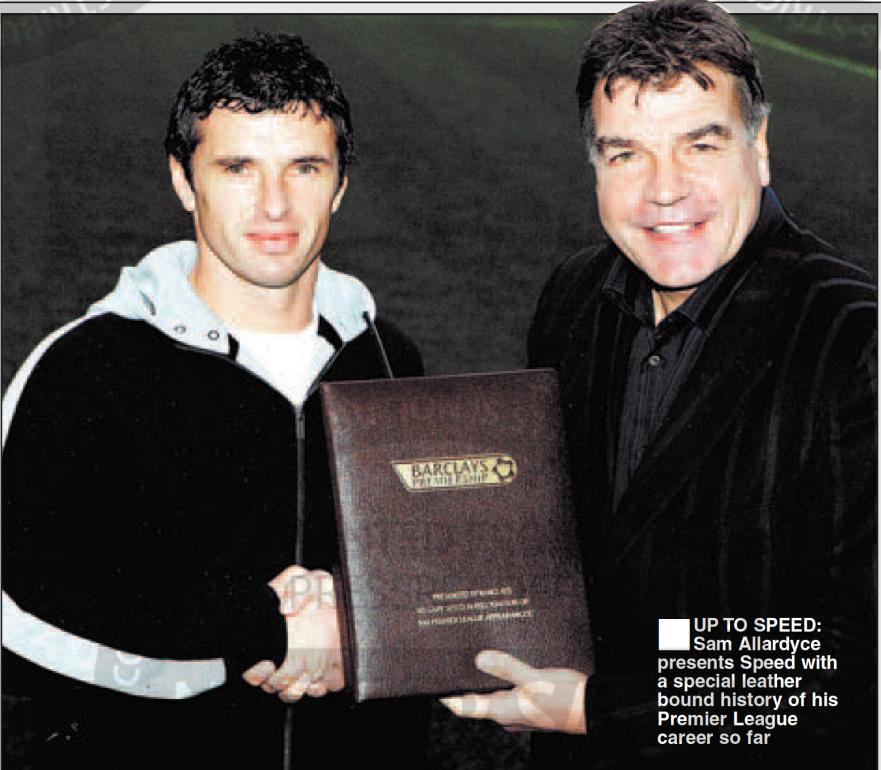
"It's now we really need to fight, not in February. We want to win at Bolton, not get the next two games out of the way and then look to start winning."

Last season, Anton Ferdinand, who is a doubt for tonight, captain Nigel Reo-Coker and Marlon Harewood were flying, but they've all struggled for form this term and Pardew thinks it's time his top men led from the front.

He added: "I'm looking for a reaction from my lieutenants. We are in a battle not to get relegated and we can't hide."

"We've had two or three years of success, where most weeks we have won, but it hasn't happened like that this year and we need to adjust."

"I've never been involved in a relegation battle as a manager or a player and I don't want to be. We have to roll up our sleeves and get on with it."



■ UP TO SPEED:
Sam Allardyce presents Speed with a special leather bound history of his Premier League career so far

Gary's fear factor

■ by JAMES DOBSON

GARY SPEED will become the first player to rack up 500 Premiership appearances tonight.

But the 37-year-old still feels like a teenager – mainly because Bolton boss Sam Allardyce and mentor Howard Wilkinson left him feeling like a terrified kid.

Speed, one of three players to score in every season since the Premier League started in 1992, puts his long career down to lessons hammered home by Wilkinson when he was starting off at Leeds.

He said: "Howard may give me credit for my attitude, but it was down to him. I was scared witless by him, that's why!"

He added: "I'm looking for a reaction from my lieutenants. We are in a battle not to get relegated and we can't hide."

"The best thing that happened to me when I was a kid was leaving home. I went to live in a council house in Leeds. I had nothing to do but play football."

"Howard was very fair but he was very strict. He had to be like that

because when he came to the club it was in a bit of a mess and he had to drag it up by its collar."

"He was one of those managers you are scared of. It's funny because it's gone full circle – I'm scared of Sam as well."

"He's been particularly scary recently because we have been playing rubbish!"

Respect

"He's one of those managers who, when he talks, you listen. He has got a unique presence."

"These days players are multi-millionaires and have everything they could wish for, so they could be hard to handle."

"But Sam handles players better than anybody I have seen. We all have respect for him."

Celtic manager Gordon Strachan

– a senior pro at Leeds when Speed's career took off – was another big influence.

"When I was 19 or 20 I used to stop off for a Burger King on the way home while Gordon Strachan would be sitting there with his banana and I would wonder, 'What's he eating that for?'

"Then when he ran past me in pre-season training, I realised why."

"He won player of the year when he was 34 because he looked after himself. I took that on board at an early age."

Bolton face West Ham at the Reebok and defeat will take the fizz out of any celebrations.

Speed explained: "I don't take a lot of notice about the 500 appearance thing. I know it is boring, but I am more concerned about getting three points."

"If we don't get those, I will be sitting in and sulking tonight."

SHEFFIELD United chief Kevin McCabe has warned Premiership rivals to forget about signing Phil Jagielka when the transfer window reopens.

Jagielka has attracted interest from West Ham, Everton and Blackburn, but manager Neil Warnock has been told he won't have to cash in on the £6m-rated midfielder unless the Blades receive an offer too good to turn down.

Plc chairman McCabe insists he would have to get a bid that "made his eyes water" to consider selling the former England Under-21 star.

McCabe said: "Phil is one of our key players and we recognise that. Sheffield United is not a selling club."

"If the price was high enough, we would have to think about it. It would have to be very high. My eyes would have to water!"

All-go Gabby

MARTIN O'NEILL has ordered wonderkid Gabby Agbonlahor to chill out – to avoid burn-out.

The Aston Villa boss has no alternative but to keep Agbonlahor on the field due to his tiny squad.

The England under-21 winger has played every minute of every game for Villa this season and will not be rested.

So O'Neill has given him vital days off this week to recharge his batteries for Monday night's tough trip to Sheffield United.

He said: "I hadn't realised he'd played every minute and that would have been a genuine surprise to me at the start of the season."

"The very fact is that he's been unable to rest and that would show our lack of strength in depth."

"I'd love to rest Gabby in an ideal world but we simply can't do that so I've told him to relax."

Royce worry

SIMON ROYCE is fearing the return to the scene of his "worst" nightmare.

QPR are at Stoke today where the keeper was attacked by a fan in the goalmouth last year.

His attacker was sentenced to 164 days in a young offenders institution and banned from the Britannia Stadium for life.

But Royce said: "I am a little bit apprehensive – I wouldn't be human if I wasn't after what happened last year."

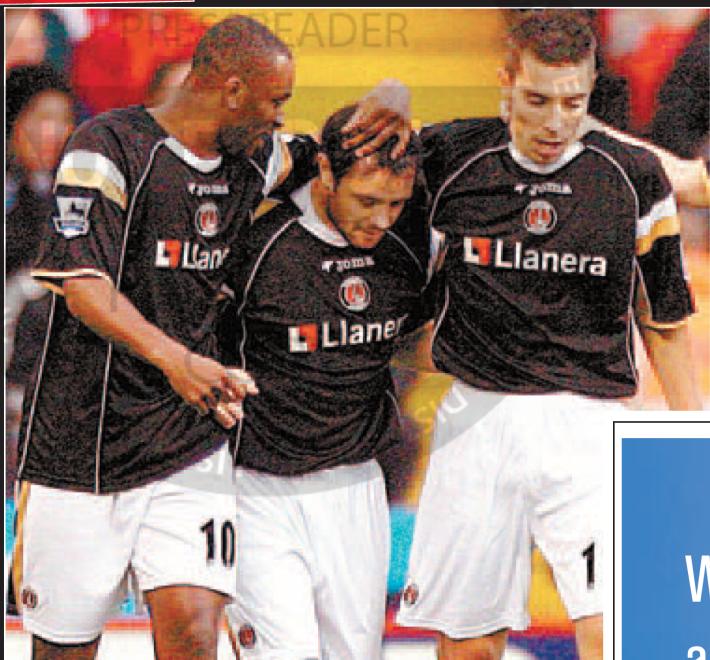
"It's not going to affect my performance – or hopefully it shouldn't do."

"I've been in the game long enough to put those things out of my mind."

"It probably is the worst thing that's ever happened to me. We've got to forget about that, and try to pick up points because we're right back in it now."

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Charlton's one to watch – and the one that got away



IN TUNE: Andy Reid celebrates his goal at Sheffield United last week

ANDY TO PULL THE STRINGS

MARTIN JOL fears guitar whizz Andy Reid will hit all the right notes for Charlton today.

And that's four months after the stocky midfielder left Spurs when he was piling on the pounds.

Tottenham boss Jol shelled out £4million to sign Reid from Nottingham Forest in January 2005.

But he battled weight problems and injuries at Spurs, failed to impress on the wing and joined Charlton in a cut-price £3m deal after just 20 starts in 18 months.

The 24-year-old Irishman was a bigger hit off the pitch than on it at White Hart Lane, leading team sing-songs on his guitar — with goal ace Robbie Keane on vocals!

Problem

Reid is now starring in central midfield for rejuvenated Charlton and Jol expects him to pull the strings at White Hart Lane today.

"Andy's a talented player — and when someone's playing regularly, they're confident," said Jol, whose side are down in 10th place.

"He's also a great guitar player and singer, together with Robbie Keane. They were 'The Dubliners' when he was here!"

"The (weight) problem occurs when you don't play and Mido had the same problem last year when he was injured.

■ by ALISTAIR GRANT

Andy had a few big injuries and when Charlton told him he had the opportunity to play regularly, we couldn't stand in his way."

Spurs are without Keane (knee) today — but Jol is backing Jermain Defoe to shine and shut up the Charlton fans set to boo him over his departure from the club back in 1999.

"It's not our problem. It's a Charlton thing with their fans," the Dutchman said.

"Maybe it's still in their heads so it'll motivate Jermain. It was the same when we played his old club West Ham."

Jol also had a pop at "spoiled" Charlton chiefs for axing boss Iain Dowie last month.

"Dowie is recognised as a talented young manager so it's awkward getting the sack after 12 league games," Jol said.

"Charlton were a bit spoilt in the past as when they were in 10th and 11th place. They weren't moaning but they weren't satisfied."

"Now they probably realise what a good time the last couple of seasons actually were."

Jol also admitted he'd hardly heard of new Addicks boss Les Reed before he became Dowie's surprise successor.

"The only thing I knew was that he worked for the FA. That was it," Jol said.

I'd have turned Defoe into a No.1 hit

■ by SCOTT COLEMAN

LES REED desperately wishes Jermain Defoe was still a Charlton player and he's not just being selfish.

Reed worked with the struggling Spurs striker from the age of nine and believes he'd be a first choice for club and country if he was still at The Valley.

Defoe left Charlton for West Ham despite all Reed's best efforts then joined Spurs as one of the stars the Hammers had to sell following their drop into the Championship.

But he has failed to claim a regular starting spot and England managers Sven

natural predator always sniffing things out. I can only hope that between now and kick-off time he goes down with the flu.

Ability

But Reed, whose side are without an away win since October last year, said: "Even as a little kid there was something about him. You don't have to tell me how dangerous a front man he is. He's a

"I don't know why he's not first choice at Spurs, that's something for Martin Jol to explain. But if he'd remained with us he would have been our No. 1 by now.

"And I'm still puzzled why he was overlooked by England last summer. I would have gone with him."

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READ THE VOICE OF SPORT EVERY SATURDAY AND MONDAY

Clarke's a high in a low year for heroes

THAT was the year that wasn't. An horrendous, hopeless, pathetic 12 months that should leave our star sportsmen hanging their heads in shame.

From the England footballers, who missed penalties at the World Cup, to Steve Harmison's first ball wide in the Ashes, they bottled it. They froze. Big time.

Of course there are exceptions – like IBF and WBO super-middleweight boxing champion Joe Calzaghe – but, generally, this was the year that was decorated in failure.

A year when we can ask what is wrong with the character of these so-called stars?

The hapless ex-England coach Sven Goran Eriksson – still being paid £13,000 a day – now tells us that England's footballers need to see a psychiatrist before they face another penalty shoot-out at a major tournament.

Thanks for that Sven. After five years, £25m and three wasted tournaments, you leave us with the news that we need to call for a shrink.

Floor

Perhaps he's right, for something has to be done to pick the nation up off the floor.

Never before was there so much expectancy going into the World Cup. It didn't just come from the media. This time Eriksson, the players and especially the FA told us this was it. What a pathetic failure.

The current Ashes series was the most eagerly-awaited tour of all because of what happened here in the summer of 2005.

Then, on Tuesday, England's batsmen reacted like scared rabbits caught in headlights. They ran for cover under the pressure.

As for the rugby team – no coach, no players who can hack the big time and no hope for next year's World Cup. They're a mess,

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The BBC names its Sports Personality of the Year tomorrow and there is not a footballer in sight.

The public have had enough of these over-hyped failures.

Only one cricketer, Monty Panesar, gets in the final list of 10.

Monty was called a great finger spinner by coach Duncan Fletcher a few months ago but now is not good enough to play against Australia. A massive mistake.

So the choice is between Jenson Button, who has won just one Grand Prix,



MAJOR FLOPS: England coach Eriksson and captain Beckham after the World Cup exit

darts player Phil Taylor, gymnast Beth Tweddle, cyclist Nicole Cooke, Andrew Murray, who has won nothing at tennis, Calzaghe, his fellow boxer Ricky Hatton, Royal Zara Phillips and, of course, golfer Darren Clarke.

Edge

As the first person to write, Clarke should be crowned Sports Personality of the Year, I'm not going to change now.

Here is someone who brought Britain to the edge of their seats with his heroics at the Ryder Cup.

Clarke is worried that he will win on a sympathy vote because his wife Heather died tragically of cancer just a few weeks before he helped the Europeans retain the trophy. This vote has nothing to do with sympathy.

I excuse Paul Collingwood, who showed again he has guts for a fight,

Clarke should win because, apart from huge ability, he showed so many others what is needed to create a winning team.

Courage, steel and determination.

The raw drive, the bottle that gets you over the finishing line when it becomes too much for so many others. The bottle

that fell out of the England football, cricket and rugby teams this year and it needs to be put back otherwise we will continue to be also rans.

It needs the right men in charge – big inspiring characters with a knowledge of tactics and man management – and, most of all, it needs

the best players. Not always those with the most ability – but winners like Clarke and Calzaghe.

We can't go through 2007 like this.

It is about time the public made it clear that British sport can't just keep talking a good game.

It also has to produce.

PLONKER OF THE WEEK

IN FACT, there are nine of them – the England cricketers who rolled over and caved in against Australia this week.

Here they are in all their glory...
Andrew Strauss, Alastair Cooke, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen, Andrew Flintoff, Geraint Jones, Ashley Giles, Steve Harmison and James Anderson.

I excuse Paul Collingwood, who showed again he has guts for a fight,

and Matthew Hoggard, the only bowler to take on the Aussies in Adelaide. The rest should be ashamed. It was a lamentable display of batting, a side in fear of Shane Warne and failure. A so-called top sports team folding like a bunch of novices. It took England 16 years to regain the Ashes and this lot handed them back in two hours.

No one expects them to retain the Ashes now but they owe it to us to make a fight of it to restore some pride.

Grass 'Em up

I COULDN'T believe my eyes when I visited the Emirates Stadium on Thursday night. The pitch was lit up with what looked like a contraption from outer space. In fact, it was Arsenal's grass-growing, mobile, aluminium structure with moveable arms and special bulbs.

The grass-growing lights, hovering a few feet off the pitch, are moved around by groundsman Paul Burgess when he thinks the turf needs attention.

The structure, made by a Dutch firm, is typical of boss Arsene Wenger. He leaves nothing to chance.

A MAN stopped by police on the London Underground this week and charged with having an offensive weapon in his possession. A cricket ball. The world has gone mad.

Shane Warne with a cricket ball – now that is an offensive weapon.

Fuelling hot Cole

MADCAP keeper Jens Lehmann is urging Arsenal fans to have a go at Ashley Cole at Chelsea tomorrow afternoon.

How pathetic is this? I don't suspect Arsenal fans will need reminding to vent their feelings towards the full-back.

I hope Cole can hold on to his own feelings.

I have only contempt for the way he engineered his move but football doesn't need an ugly incident at Stamford Bridge.

Big blow for Joe

JOSE MOURINHO says he has nine players who are untouchable fixtures in his side.

And he is happy to name them – Petr Cech, John Terry, Ricardo Carvalho, Ashley Cole, Michael Essien, Frank Lampard, Claude Makelélé, Michael Ballack and Didier Drogba.

One of the odd men out then is Joe Cole and how does he feel after that snub? Unwanted I suggest.

**SERIOUSLY
football****Kop to target top stars with sheikh's millions**

RAFA'S SET TO SPLASH CASH

RAFA BENITEZ is poised to join the game's big spenders once the Dubai billionaires complete their takeover of Liverpool.

Already in his native Spain they are saying the sky's the limit and they predict he will be able to provide serious competition for Real Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea, Manchester United and AC Milan in the transfer market.

Liverpool have been added to Chelsea, United and Milan as probable bidders for Atletico Madrid striker Fernando Torres, one of the hottest properties in European football. It's believed that £25m is the minimum Atletico will accept for the 22-year-old, with big rivals United heading the queue.

Dubai International Capital, the investment company of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, confirmed this week they had set the wheels in motion for a proposed £450m takeover. Until then, Benitez had accepted he would be among the also-rans in the race for new players.

Sights

Even now he remains cautious, cooling speculation about big buys when the transfer window reopens on January 1.

But he admits he has a wish-list and he is raising his sights.

"We have some names just in case we get some more money," he said.

Prominent on it are Daniel Alves and Shaun Wright-Phillips, with Blackburn's Lucas Neill almost certainly on his way to Anfield in a swap deal with Stephen Warnock.

Benitez has pursued Brazilian Alves, Sevilla's attacking right-back, for a long time but has never been able to afford him.

Even now, the UEFA Cup holders insist he isn't for sale, with director of football Ramon Rodriguez claiming an announcement confirming a contract extension for the 23-year-old would be made "in the next few hours".

But either next month

■ by CHRIS HARPER

or next summer they could find Liverpool's offer too good to refuse.

Benitez was among those interested in England winger Wright-Phillips before he left Manchester City for Chelsea last year and could top any bid for him, even though Jose Mourinho won't be keen on selling to a rival.

Ahead of today's game against Fulham, the Liverpool boss said: "It's not easy to win trophies trying to buy players all around the world at a low price. If you have a lot of money and say five names and sign five stars, it's not difficult."

"We have been working without money. If you have money, you need to change targets, but we'd prefer that situation.

Easier

"The responsibility is the same if you spend £1 or £100. When you sign a player for this club, it is to help you win trophies.

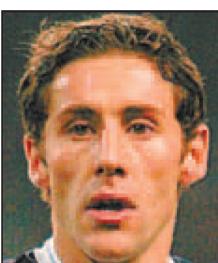
"I've had this responsibility before, and we won some trophies, and I have same responsibility now, and I would like to have the same responsibility in the future.

With more money, it's always easier to sign the right players and better players.

"If I have more possibilities and more money, maybe it will be easier for the team to be closer to the top and to win more things."



FERN BRITAIN:
Atletico Madrid ace
Fernando Torres could be
heading to these shores
if Liverpool boss Rafa
Benitez gets his way



BROWN: Always Kops it

MICHAEL SO BROWNED OFF

■ by STEVE GRIFFITHS

FULHAM midfielder Michael Brown is desperate to make up for his Anfield agony by staging a smash-and-grab raid today.

Boyhood Liverpool fan Brown has experienced some of the worst moments of his career at Anfield and is yet to be on the winning side there.

As a teenager, Brown played in the Manchester City team that suffered a 4-0 League Cup thrashing at Anfield then

Kopped it 6-0 just four days later in the Premiership. Those defeats in 1995 were bad enough but Brown's Anfield luck hasn't got any better since.

He lost a League Cup semi-final with Sheffield United in 2003 and scored an own goal as Fulham lost 5-1 last season.

Brown said: "I remember when I was 17 I played there twice in a

week in the League Cup and then the Premiership. I went on as a sub both times and we got beat 4-0 then lost again there 6-0.

"They had Fowler, Barnes, Rush, McManaman, Redknapp.

"It was a hell of a team back then and it was the first time I had played at Anfield so I was delighted just to be there.

"I lost a semi-final there with Sheffield United and it was 5-1 last year in one of my first

games for Fulham. I knocked one in at the wrong end.

"Four, six and five. I've not done too well to be honest. If the boss finds out I think I might get dropped.

"The game last year was strange because we did all right for 70 minutes then crumbled.

"For the own goal it hit me in my stride, a perfect finish. At least I've scored at Anfield. That was always a dream of mine!"

Gareth to play it cool

■ by IAN MURTAGH

MIDDLEBROOK have come up with a novel plan to halt their slump – no more celebrating.

In recent weeks, when they've found the net, the opposition have hit back with a goal of their own within minutes.

Gareth Southgate's side have picked up just one point out of the last nine despite leading at Villa and hauling themselves back against Manchester United and Spurs.

The Boro chief has targeted the next six games as crucial if his side are to avoid a relegation dogfight, starting at home to Wigan this afternoon.

Just don't expect the Boro players to make a song and dance about it if they score.

Defender Andrew Taylor said: "The manager had a word with us and focused on the fact that we've worked hard to get back into games only to give away a sloppy goal.

Sting

"I think it's mainly down to concentration."

"Maybe we're switching off because we're so happy and excited after scoring."

Taylor revealed that Boro will use only Southgate-approved celebrations.

"He's given us a few different things we could do after scoring in an attempt to calm us down.

"Instead of running back into position straightforwardly, we need to slow it down, take our time a bit and prevent our opponents from kicking off quickly and catching us cold."

"Sometimes we need to gather our thoughts and take the sting out of the situation a bit."

• Boro defender Robert Huth has been ruled out for six weeks after breaking a bone in his foot during training.

Jewell of the South

■ by NEIL JOHNSTON

WIGAN boss Paul Jewell reckons Gareth Southgate deserves a crack at managing in the top-flight – even though the Middlesbrough boss is not qualified.

The League Managers' Association is unhappy Southgate has been allowed to continue in the Boro hot-seat as he does not have the necessary coaching badges.

But Jewell, whose side face Boro today, insisted: "You learn more in a week as a manager than you do on any course."

"Just because you have a good coaching badge doesn't make you a good coach."

"I've seen some of the best so-called coaches and I'm just glad they haven't coached me."

"I'm all for giving someone a chance."

David Cotterill may start with Henri Camara in the Wigan attack as Emile Heskey is suspended.

**SERIOUSLY
football****OLD TRAFFORD CRUNCH: United manager tips flying****City boss wants Pearce of the action**

PEARCE: In with a shout

STUART PEARCE fears Manchester City will always be in Manchester United's slipstream – even if he lands a transfer jackpot from possible new owners at the club.

Blues boss Pearce takes his team to Old Trafford today desperate to end City's 32-year winless streak at the home of their bitter rivals.

Clout

United's financial clout and global appeal have always left City struggling to make their own mark and outdo their neighbours.

And despite the prospects of new investment and a possible takeover at Eastlands, Pearce claims you only have to look at the £50m spent by Liverpool since

■ by MARK OGDEN

their 2005 Champions League triumph to realise how much it will take to challenge United at the very top.

Pearce said: "When you talk about the investment it would take to allow us to compete with United on a regular basis, you are talking about a massive amount."

"Put it this way, for what money Liverpool have put into their team in recent years, it would be fair to say that not even they are competing with United and Chelsea at the moment."

"They are one of the biggest sides in the country and winning the European Cup last year was a fantastic achievement."

"But if you are talking about guaranteeing that you are in the first

one or two in the Premiership, it's a massive, tall order."

"And the finance and evolution that it would take is some ask."

"But because of our stadium and fanbase, this club has everything you could ask for if you were looking to invest in the Premiership."

Enjoy

"The downside might be that we play in the same city as arguably the biggest club in the world, but somebody out there might just enjoy the challenge of pitting their wits against that."

"I can't see the point of a club being taken over if it doesn't financially benefit the playing side, though."

Despite City's woeful record at Old

Trafford, Pearce's men cruised to a 3-1 win against Sir Alex Ferguson's team at Eastlands last season.

And although United can go nine points clear of Chelsea with a win this afternoon, Pearce insists that today's game means more to the blue half of Manchester than the red.

He said: "I think the derby means more to City than it does to United but I think it always means more to the underdog."

"United will be saying they had a massive game against Benfica and that they are competing against Chelsea and Liverpool and one thing or another."

"Some of their fans do live in Manchester, though, and will work with Manchester fans, so they will be keen to have the bragging rights as well."

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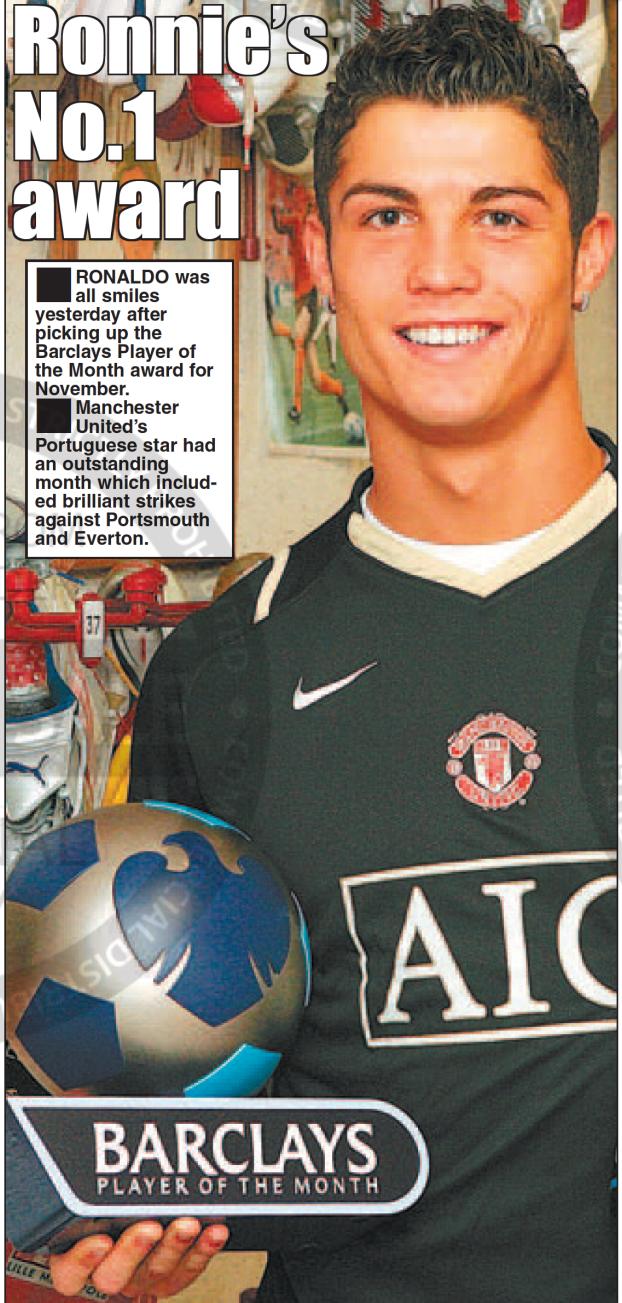
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Ronnie's No.1 award

RONALDO was all smiles yesterday after picking up the Barclays Player of the Month award for November.

Manchester United's Portuguese star had an outstanding month which included brilliant strikes against Portsmouth and Everton.



Ryan to go on and smash Charlton's mark

GIGGSY WILL TOP BOBBY'S RECORD

says SIR ALEX FERGUSON

■ by MARK OGDEN

SIR ALEX FERGUSON has backed Ryan Giggs to snatch Sir Bobby Charlton's place in Manchester United's record books.

Giggs, 33, will move level with Munich survivor and 1988 European Cup winner Bill Foulkes as second only to Charlton in United's all-time list of appearances when he faces Manchester City at Old Trafford today.

The Welsh winger, who burst on to the scene with a goal on his first United start as a 17-year-old against City in May 1991, takes his tally to 688 games this afternoon. And with Charlton just 71 appearances ahead of Giggs, Ferguson admits that the evergreen midfielder has what it takes to knock the Old Trafford legend off top spot.

Ferguson said: "Ryan will only be 71 games behind Sir Bobby if he plays against City, so I think it is a realistic target for him to break that record eventually."

Hungry

"He is 33 but is still in great physical shape and if that remains the case, he could go on for another two or three years at least."

"Perhaps he will have to tailor his game in terms of where he plays because he has been charging up and down the wing for 15 years and no player is capable of doing that forever."

"You have seen players do that over the years and they have come and gone."

"But Ryan is still there and it is an exceptional record. It's incredible."

"He has 18 months left on his contract and that's far away, so there is no need to offer him a new deal when I can keep him hungry!"

"The modern approach with players over 30 is to give them one-year contracts, though. We did that with Denis Irwin and he left us at 36."

With over 15 years of service under his belt at United, Giggs has already chalked up a staggering 24 Manchester derbies.

But despite his age, Ferguson insists that Giggs is still capable of producing the brilliance

United long-players

RYAN GIGGS is set to go joint-second in Manchester United's all-time appearance list today.

Here are the club's top 10 appearance-makers, headed by Reds legend Sir Bobby Charlton.

1 Bobby Charlton	759 apps
2 Bill Foulkes	688
3 Ryan Giggs	687
4 Alex Stepney	539
5 Tony Dunne	535
6 Denis Irwin	529
7 Gary Neville	524
8 Joe Spence	510
9 Paul Scholes	509
10 Arthur Albiston	485

he displayed as a raw teenager.

Ferguson said: "His performance against Benfica on Wednesday was typical Ryan because he moved his game up another notch."

"I can always sense with him when he is coming to the boil."

"Like a lot of players who depend on speed, they can't do it for long periods, but when Ryan gets his pockets of form he is absolutely devastating."

Special

"I sensed he was coming back to his best again against Middlesbrough last week and I think he is ready to produce some really good stuff again."

"With Ji-Sung Park fit again, I don't have to play Ryan every week."

"And that just means I can keep him for the special games that he seems to thrive on."



Despite an unbeaten home record against City that stretches back to 1974, Ferguson admits that Stuart Pearce's men can hurt United.

City claimed a 3-1 win at Eastlands last season in a game that saw Cristiano Ronaldo sent off and the United manager has warned his players not to underestimate their local

opponents. He said: "We have had a couple of bad performances against City and, when that happens, you can lose games."

"We don't plan to have bad performances but it can happen and some of our players aren't accustomed to derby games."

"It's easy to say forget

it's a derby and play your normal game but it's not a normal game."

"City will be charged up. They'll come with a system to get something out of the game and there will be emotion from both sets of fans."

"But we have to show we can cope no matter what system City come up with to try to stop us."

Information Station

CRICKET

Australian Chairman's XI v
England XI
(Last half of 1997)
England XI

Joyce run out.....36

Shah c Campbell b Matthews.....22

Shah c & b Matthews.....0

Bopara c Worthington b Vokes.....53

Stewart c North b Matthews.....69

Dalyrmple c Rogers b Matthews.....17

Plunkett c & b Worthington.....40

Plunkett run out.....38

1 Mahood not out.....1

Extras.....3

Loss of Wkt.....25

Bowling: Angst 9-1-29-0, Dorey 6-0-36-

0, Matthews 7-1-38-3, Worthington 7-1-21-

2, Ervine 6-0-31-0, Voges 6-0-33-1,

Pomerenk 6-0-30-0, Campbell 1-0-24-0.

Australian Chairman's XI

Rogers b Panesar.....32

Ronchi at Stead b Panesar.....89

Vorster c North b Matthews.....89

Vorster b Panesar b Panesar.....58

Campbell not out.....1

Extras.....9

Total (3 wkt., 40.1 overs).....260

Bowling: Plunkett 7.3-1-46-0, Lewis 7-

0-3-13-0, Mahmood 10-0-49-0, Panesar 10-

-0-6-2, Dalyrmple 4-0-27-1, Hellwale 14-

-0-18-0.

Chairman's XI won by 7 wkt.

First Test - Day 1 of 5

Christiansen: Sri Lanka 154, and

125-8. (Sanakkara 63no), New Zealand 209 (Velotti 63).

International Series (1-day)

Mirpur: Zimbabwe 146, Bangladesh 125-7. (Ahmed 58no). Bangladesh bt Zimbabwe by 8 wickets.

GOLF

European/Sunshine Tour Alfred

Dunhill Championship - (Leopard

Creek GC, Mpumalanga, South Africa)

- 2nd Round (GB & I unless stated

par 72): 133 P Lonard (Aus), 134 R Pamplin (Aus), P Gow (Aus), N Green (Aus), W Ormsby (Aus).

TODAY'S DIARY FOOTBALL

(3pm unless stated)

Nationwide: North: Alfreton Town v

Nuneaton, Blyth Spartans v Kettering,

Grimsby Town v Gainsborough, Fahey

Cole & Barnes v Barrow-in-Furness v

Workington, Hinckley Utd v Hucknall

Hyde v Scarborough, Moor Green v

Vauxhall Motors, Redditch v

Stalybridge, Worcester v Brummen

v Farnborough, 133 P Lonard (Aus), 134 R Pamplin (Aus), P Gow (Aus), N Green (Aus), W Ormsby (Aus).

North: Darlington v Hartlepool

v Stockton, Hartlepool v Hartlepool

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Untouchable Chelsea

Drogba's menace returns to Sendero

■ by DAVID WOODS

THEY say once bitten, twice shy but Philippe Senderos returns for Arsenal tomorrow to face Chelsea having been savaged by a Drogba THREE times.

However Gunners' boss Arsene Wenger bravely predicted the Switzerland international would this time be up to muzzling striker Didier Drogba.

With Kolo Toure suspended and William Gallas still out with a thigh injury, Wenger has to rely on his youngest ever back four tomorrow.

Johan Djourou, 19, Gael Clichy, 21, Emmanuel Eboué, 23, and Senderos, 21, are the quartet trying to keep the champions at bay.

Last season, Drogba found more holes in Senderos' game than Swiss cheese as Chelsea beat Arsenal three times, starting with the Community Shield.

Drogba bagged three goals in the games, constantly embarrassing the centre-back, who was booked in two of the encounters.

Senderos picked up a serious shoulder injury at the World Cup and his confidence is unlikely to be high after returning to Premiership action at Bolton a fortnight ago.

Improved

Arsenal lost that match 3-1 and four days later Senderos was sent off at Fulham after two cautions in the 2-1 defeat.

"It is a big challenge for him," said Wenger. "But he will play. He has had some tough games against Drogba."

"What is good at his age is that the next year you can prove that you have improved a lot – and he has improved a lot."

"Last year he had some very good games in the Champions League when we went 10 games without conceding a goal."

"I am very confident he will do well. It is all part of the learning process – Phillippe is today more experienced and he can show that in a game against Drogba."

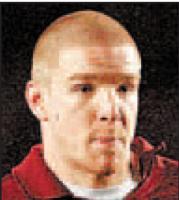
Drogba has already proved this season he's taken a step forward, with 14 goals, including five in the Champions League.

"Who has got more better? That question can be answered at the final whistle on Sunday," admitted Wenger.

Eboué is in no doubt that his Ivory Coast team-mate will pose the biggest threat to the Gunners tomorrow.

The full-back said: "The main threat Chelsea possess is Didi. He's been awesome this season and I am convinced that, as a defence, we'll have to work very hard."

"It's crucial that we have to stop him, but not do



SENDEROS: Test

TOP SIX

Barclays Premiership

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Ps
Man Utd.....	16	13	2	1	35	8	41
Chelsea.....	15	11	2	2	25	8	35
Arsenal.....	15	7	4	4	25	12	25
Portsmouth.....	16	7	4	5	21	14	25
Liverpool.....	16	7	4	5	19	15	25
Reading.....	16	8	1	7	19	21	25

at the expense of forgetting about the other players.

"But right now, Drogba is much more of a threat than Shevchenko is."

"Sunday's game is very important for us and not only because of the rivalry that we have with Chelsea. If we want to continue to have a chance of winning the title, we must win at Stamford Bridge, by whatever means possible."

"If we go 13 or 16 points behind Chelsea, that would be an almost impossible gap to make up in the Premier League."

"Until now, the week has gone perfectly. We won convincingly against Spurs and we have qualified for the last 16 in the Champions League. On Sunday, we're facing our hardest task by playing Chelsea in their stadium."

"But when we played at Old Trafford, nobody gave us a chance and we won. Why can't the same thing happen again?"

Wenger, whose team trail Manchester United by 16 points and Chelsea by 10, certainly would like it to happen again.

"I would enjoy it if we won it, and I would give everything for us to do so," he said.



TOUGH AT THE TOP:
Ballack puts in a strong challenge against Levski Sofia in the Champions League last Wednesday

star sticks knife in

The Chel-fire clubs

■ by ALISTAIR GRANT

Chelsea 1 Arsenal 2

February 2004

GUDJOHNSEN went from hero to zero inside 60 minutes when he put the Blues in front but was then sent off for a dive and a foul. Claudio Ranieri's side folded as Patrick Vieira and Edu struck for the Gunners.

Chelsea 1 Arsenal 3

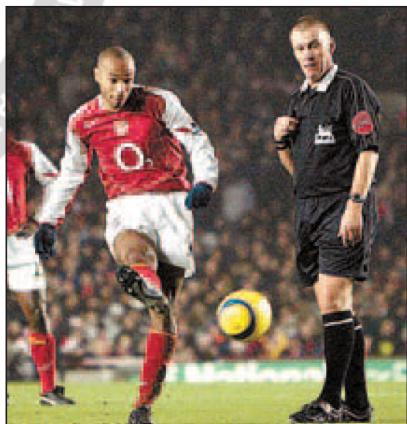
March 2003

WENGER called for an FA probe after Henry was hit by a lighter from the crowd. More red-card controversy as Pascal Cygan was sent off for twice hacking down Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink. John Terry scored at both ends and Sylvain Wiltord and Lauren got the other goals.

Chelsea 1 Arsenal 1

September 2002

WENGER blasted ref Andy D'Urso after Patrick Vieira was sent off for two yellow cards as Arsenal trailed to Gianfranco Zola's goal before Kolo Toure bagged a leveller.



SNEAKY: Henry's controversial 2004 free-kick

by taunting Guns over their attractive football

BARCLAYS
PREMIERSHIP

PRETTY BOYS ARE BUNCH OF LOSERS

says Chelsea's
MICHAEL BALLACK

MICHAEL BALLACK last night taunted Arsenal by claiming playing attractive football means nothing if you come second.

And he also stuck the knife in by insisting they can't cope without Thierry Henry in the long term.

Chelsea have come under criticism for not playing entertaining football.

But Ballack points to the back-to-back titles Chelsea have won – and the 2002 season at Bayer Leverkusen when he skippered them to runners-up spots in the Champions League, Bundesliga and the German Cup.

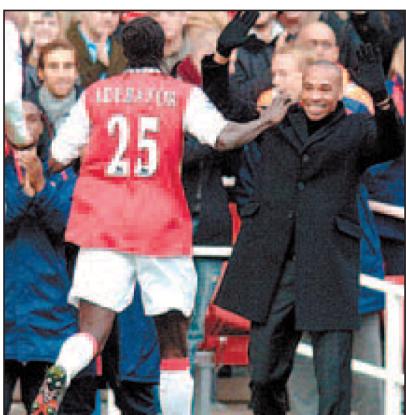
He doesn't accept Chelsea lack entertainment value, but most of all is adamant they are winners.

Risks

He said: "I don't necessarily agree with the thing about us playing less attractive football."

"I don't share the opinion that Arsenal are more attractive than Chelsea, but it's like Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen."

"At Leverkusen, we played attractive football and we didn't win anything. You might play more attractively but you might take risks and lose and success is about winning. That is all that matters."



MISSING LINK: Thierry Henry is sidelined

■ by DANNY FULLBROOK

Ballack accepts Arsenal have won some important games without Henry, but he added: "He is a key player. They play with a compact midfield with Thierry Henry as the main man up front."

"He has missed the last two games and they have done well. They can compensate in the short term but not in the long term."

Ballack also insisted he is delighted to be a Chelsea untouchable – but promised there is more to come.

Jose Mourinho this week claimed he has nine untouchables in his side and, despite Ballack's difficult start to the season, was happy to include the Germany skipper on that list.

Like Andriy Shevchenko, who is still struggling with his form, the former Bayern Munich star arrived in the summer in a blaze of publicity.

He admits that, with 12 or 13 world-class players in the squad, he has had to learn to get to grips with playing for Chelsea.

There was much speculation at the beginning of the season about whether Frank Lampard and Ballack could play together.

The England midfielder has settled down, but Ballack has shown only glimpses of his top form. He defended himself by saying: "Jose is a great manager. If he says I am one of his untouchables, it must be true."

"Of course I can play better. I have only been here four months."

"There is a certain difficulty in integrating not just in English football but in the team."

Huge

"There are a lot of good players in the squad so it's difficult for the manager to keep everyone happy. Jose has an idea about football and I agree with him."

Playing for Bayer Leverkusen and Bayern Munich, Ballack would dominate from midfield, in the same way he did at the World Cup.

He hasn't been quite so forceful since arriving at Stamford Bridge, and that is perhaps down to the fact every player is such a huge



■ **EYE'LL GET BETTER:** Michael Ballack insists that his best is yet to come

name, but he added: "The question of being dominant isn't just about scoring and making goals."

"It is about how you fit into the team and in this team there are many strong characters who want to be noticed."

"There is a slight danger of being selfish and you have to be careful that doesn't happen. Claude Makelele isn't spectacular but his contribution is immense."

"I have only been here four months and I compare it to when I went to Bayern Munich. It was also difficult, but this time I have come to a different country as well. It's the same with any new job, so I don't worry about that."

"I feel I've settled in well. I feel very good. It is slightly more difficult for the family, but because of games and training I have settled in very well." Ballack has taken a lot of stick over the years from

opposition fans because he has been seen as aloof and arrogant.

So he will know exactly how Ashley Cole will feel when Arsenal supporters start dishing out stick tomorrow to a player they now consider a traitor.

Fine

He insists Cole isn't bothered by the confrontation. "He was very relaxed in training today. Sometimes fans from your former club aren't very happy, but Ashley is an experienced player and I'm sure he will be fine."

Ballack and the rest of the Chelsea squad are aware they could be nine points behind Manchester United by the time they take on Arsenal at Stamford Bridge.

The 29-year-old added: "We can't be distracted by that and hopefully we can concentrate on winning this game."

Weng's plea to cool it

From Back Page
criticisms of the club in his autobiography, My Defence, published after his move. Wenger warned: "Recently in Paris we had a dead guy in a game and that's not what we want in football."

"I'd be happy if Chelsea-Arsenal on Sunday is a fantastic game and a good promotion for football."

"My responsibility is to make sure that it is. I would not like any stupid aggression but a feast of football like it can be in England."

Fakes

Wenger was referring to the clashes in Paris when a PSG fan was shot dead by a policeman and another seriously injured after rivals fans clashed following the French club's UEFA Cup defeat by Israeli side Hapoel Tel Aviv last month.

Police have also warned Arsenal fans they will be kicked out or arrested if they produce fake Cashley Cole £20 notes, giant inflatable mobile phones — a reference to a bizarre supposed sex act which Cole was wrongly linked to — or target the defender with gay jibes.

Police, with the support of Chelsea and Arsenal, have launched a poster campaign around Stamford Bridge, warning offenders could be arrested.

The Gunners have even gone to the extent of e-mailing fans on their away scheme to remind them to behave.

Fergie's war cry

From Back Page
is, without question, as good as anything I've seen for the last few years. To win the league playing that way is a great motivation."

Fergie claims that Chelsea will be forced to prove their mettle to win the title. "We'll feel when Arsenal supporters start dishing out stick tomorrow to a player they now consider a traitor."

He said: "I hope we go nine points clear. You're far better off having points on the board. Games in hand have to be navigated."

"We've had to do it and the point is that you've got to win them. Chelsea haven't had to chase before."

Don't go to war with the Blues

■ by MARK OGDEN

SIR ALEX FERGUSON has told his Manchester United players to forget about turning the title race into a war with Chelsea.

United winger Ryan Giggs has claimed that beating Chelsea's mammoth spending power to the title is a huge motivation inside Old Trafford.

But with United aiming to go nine points clear with victory over Manchester City today, Ferguson insists that his team should not focus solely on Jose Mourinho's men.

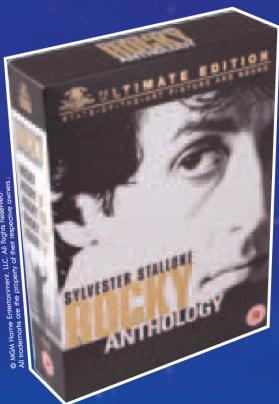
Ferguson said: "I think there is a better motivation for the squad than that."

"It is about what they can produce as a team, no matter who is in the way of that."

"They are producing football that

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Seconds out, round one...



TAKE THAT:
Audley
Harrison (top)
and Danny
Williams get to
grips with each
other yesterday –
outside the ring

■ by KEVIN FRANCIS

DANNY WILLIAMS and Audley Harrison came to blows yesterday when their big fight weigh-in descended into a brawl.

The pair meet at London's ExCel Arena in a heavyweight contest tonight, and now face hefty fines after the chaotic scenes marred the build-up.

Both fighters posed with promoter Frank Warren but things turned nasty as they glared at each other, with Williams then throwing a punch at Harrison, the former

Turn to Page 57

WE DON'T WANT A DEATH

Weng calls for Cole bashers to cool it



■ by DAVID WOODS

ARSENE WENGER has pleaded for Arsenal fans to cool it, fearing someone could be killed at Stamford Bridge tomorrow.

The Arsenal boss is worried that the Ashley Cole controversy could spark a tragedy similar to that one that saw a French fan lose his life a fortnight ago.

Wenger (*left*) picked his words carefully last night as Arsenal prepared for their trip to Chelsea, where ex-Gunner Cole is sure to be singled out for abuse by the 3,100 travelling fans.

Cole left Wenger's team on deadline day after one of the bitterest transfers in the history of the game.

And the England fullback inflamed north Londoners further with his wide-ranging

Turn to Page 71